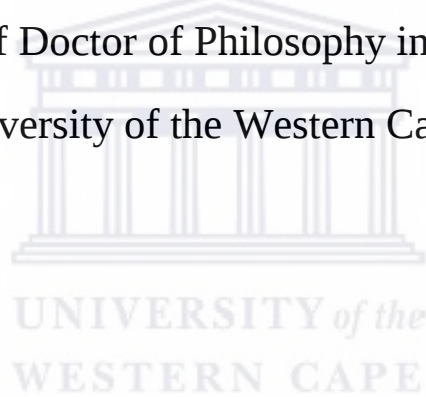


Social and Political History of Wollo Province in Ethiopia: 1769-1916

By Misganaw Tadesse Melaku

A Dissertation Submitted in the fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of the Western Cape



Principal Supervisor: Prof. Suren Pillay

Co-Supervisor: Prof. Teshale Tibebu

6 September 2019

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DECLARATION

I, Misganaw Tadesse Melaku, hereby declare that ***Social and Political History of Wollo Province in Ethiopia: 1769-1916*** is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Misganaw Tadesse Melaku



Date: 06 September 2019

Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to *Bete Abreham*



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Acknowledgment

Foremost, I would like to recognize the praiseworthy God from the bottom of my heart who deserves the credit for everything in my life. Thanks for giving me the strength and wisdom in my study. This research has been made possible by the generous support of the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). However, it must be noted that the opinions expressed, and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the aforementioned organization. My gratitude goes to Dr. Nthabiseng Motsemme and her NIHSS staff for their kind help in critical moments.

I am extremely grateful to my principal supervisor Prof. Suren Pillay and co-supervisor Prof. Teshale Tibebe for their invaluable advice and supervision starting from the stage of proposal writing to the final draft of this thesis. I have enormously benefited from their critical comments. Their guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis.

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Next in line are my intimate friends whose encouragement helped me throughout my study. Though I could not list all of them, a few deserve special mention Ale, Assefa, Dagnachew, Anteneh, Tesfaye, Iyasu, Alemeu, and Denekeu. I would also like to extend my special thanks to Awugchew Amare, Dr. Beza Desalegn and Emeshaw Worke for their advice, comments, and sharing experiences.

With a special mention to Dr. Tedros, Dr. Fikre-Yohannes, Firewoyini, Yohanan, Tesfaye (Quatri), Fikrewold, Mwayi, Brightman, Meuz, Mulat, my friends without your support the journey would not have been enjoyable. Thank you!

Abstract

Wollo, formerly referred to as “Bete Amhara,” refers to a region of Amharic-speaking Christians. It was one of the oldest provinces of Ethiopia; located in the north-eastern part of Ethiopia at the cross-roads of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Sudan, and central and Southern Ethiopia. Its geostrategic central position has made it a historical focal point of historical dynamics in Ethiopia. Due to its geostrategic position, many writers of the medieval period referred to Wollo as the “center and the heartland of the Abyssinian Empire.”¹ On account of these, major historical battles among political, social, and religious forces occurred in this region leaving their own mark on it and the nature of the Ethiopian state.

Before the sixteenth century, Wollo had been a center of history, political administration, religion, and religious education. As a result, numerous historical events have taken place in this province. Due to such factors, it was part of the historically dominant regions in Ethiopia. However, after the sixteenth century we see a decline in the position of Wollo. A province which was part of the center, afterwards the sixteenth century, had been downgraded to the periphery following its domination by Islam and Oromo, which were two subjects of marginalization in Ethiopian historiography. Thereafter, the province was relegated from the country’s political ground and historical narration due to ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds.

In the earliest recordings of the historically dominant groups of Ethiopia, Wollo was not properly represented as it was regarded as a Muslim and Oromo province. In much of the recently

¹ Manoel de Almeida, *The History of High Ethiopia or Abyssinia, Extracts in some Records of Ethiopia: 1593 – 1646*. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint Limited, (1967), p. 100

recorded literature on the subaltern groups in the post-1991 period, the internal events of Wollo have been ignored.

Therefore, both in the past and recently, the socio-political history of Wollo province has never been given due regard. Despite the fact that Wollo bears elements of both the historically dominant and historical subaltern of Ethiopia, it has not been provided proper representation by the narrative of the historically dominant groups, as it is not given proper place in the emergent history of the subaltern in Post-1991 Ethiopia. This paradox of Wollo belonging to both but not given due attention and representation is the corridor leading to explore the dark sides of Ethiopian historiography.

Thus, this study attempts to examine why, how and in what way Wollo has been neglected from the country's political ground and historical narration. It will also try to reconstruct the social and political history of the province in the period under study.

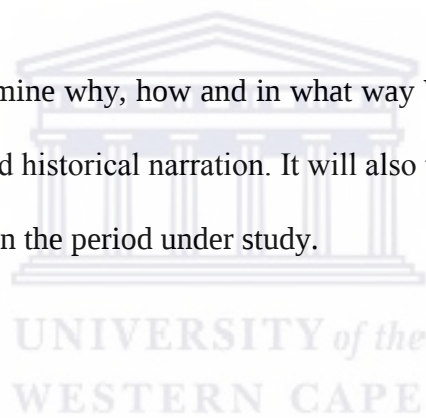


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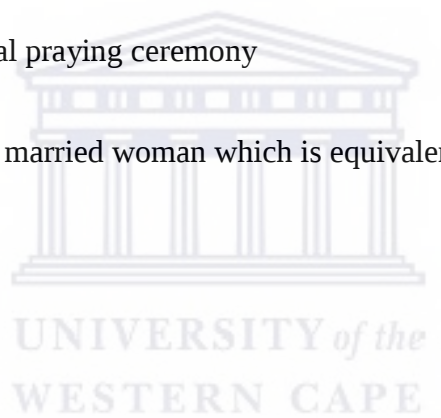


Glossary of Terms

<i>Aba</i>	A horse name given to notable individuals
<i>Abba</i>	title of clergymen meaning ‘father’
<i>Ato</i>	a civil title given to ordinary people which is equivalent to Mr
<i>Abune</i>	bishop
<i>Aleqa</i>	head of a church
<i>Awrajja</i>	an administrative unit below the province
<i>Azaz</i>	commander
<i>Balabat</i>	landlord, local hereditary ruler
<i>Bejerond</i>	Royal Treasury
<i>Deber</i>	a major parish church
<i>Dejjazmach</i>	a traditional military title below <i>Ras</i>
<i>E. C</i>	Ethiopian Calendar
<i>Fitawrari</i>	commander of the vanguard a military title below <i>Dejjazmach</i>
<i>Galla</i>	a derogatory connotation which is given to the Oroms
<i>Gasha</i>	unit of land measurement equivalent to 40 hectares
<i>Grazmach</i>	commander of the left, a politico-military title above <i>balambaras</i>

<i>Hamsa–Aleqa</i>	a military title which represents head of fifty soldiers
<i>Injera</i>	leavened thin pancake-like bread, the stable diet in much of highland Ethiopia
<i>Lij</i>	‘chlid’, honorific title generally reserved for sons of royal family, and of the upper nobility
<i>Liqe-Kahenat</i>	head of clergy
<i>Leqe-Ṭebebet</i>	ecclesiastical title, head of the wise
<i>Medhane-Alem</i>	Holly Saviour
<i>Melake–Berhan</i>	clerical title to a <i>däber</i> church which means Angel of light
<i>Melake-Genet</i>	clerical title to a <i>däber</i> church which means Angel of heaven
<i>Memher</i>	teacher, <i>abbot</i> of a monastery
<i>Memre</i>	priest
<i>Meqedäs</i>	the inner section of a church which is considered as the holy of holies and seat of altar
<i>Mesqel</i>	the day on which the finding of holy cross is celebrated
<i>Negus</i>	king
<i>Qegn-Azmach</i>	commander of the right wing, a politico-military title above <i>Balambaras</i>
<i>Qäsis</i>	priest
<i>Qedest</i>	the middle section of a church where the Holy Communion is given to people

<i>Ras</i>	title conferred to the ruling families, provincial governors and high officials, below the title of king
<i>Reése mesafent</i>	Head of the nobles
<i>Şähäfe-Tezaz</i>	Minister of Pen
<i>Shäykh</i>	Muslim cleric
<i>Tor Azaž</i>	War leader
<i>Tabot</i>	a replica of the True Ark of the Covenant
<i>Wadaja</i>	a traditional praying ceremony
<i>Woyzero</i>	a title of a married woman which is equivalent to Mrs.



Chapter I

Introduction

General Introduction

In October 2015, at the launch program of my book on the *Life and Time of King Mikael of Wollo*, many of the attendees of the event suggested that I research and write more on the history of Wollo. It was at that time that the seed of this project was sown. When I joined the University of the Western Cape in 2016 for my PhD in history, I already had a project to be studied i.e. the social and political history of Wollo province.

Wollo, formerly referred to as “Bete Amhara,” is one of the oldest provinces of Ethiopia. The province has been regarded as a theatre of social and political engagements: population movements, ethnic interactions, political rivalry, religious expansion, and persecution, and the like. Wollo’s location in the central part of medieval Ethiopia is said to have been a factor for major events to occur in this region. Though Wollo had been a center of history, political administration, religion and religious education during the medieval period, it had been marginalized from the country’s political ground and historical narration due to ethnic, religious and political reasons.

In many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century recordings, Wollo is described as a “*Galla*”¹ and ‘Islam’ province. Ethiopian royal chronicles and traveler accounts also defined Wollo as a

¹ The name *Galla* has a derogatory connotation of savage, uncivilized, uncultured, enemy, slave or inherently inferior

province infected by the permanent stain of “Galla”. In addition to local narrations, foreign sources of the same period have left similar accounts on Wollo.

Hence, in much of the earliest recordings of the historically dominant groups, Wollo was not properly represented since it was regarded as ‘Islam’ and ‘Oromo’, which were two subjects of marginalization in Ethiopian historiography. Despite its geographical location in the heartland of the country, Wollo has been regarded as an Oromo province due to the socio-political developments during the sixteenth century and onwards.

In much of the recently recorded literature on the Oromo in the post-1991 period, the internal events of Wollo have been ignored. Almost all the Oromo centric writers and researchers such as Assefa Jaleta, Mohammed Hassen, Begna Fufa Dugassa, Tessema Ta’a, Holcomb Sisay and others have given their emphasis to southern Oromo. *The Journal of Oromo Studies* follows the same trend². These recordings considered Wollo as an Amhara province since it is located in the Amhara region of Federal Ethiopia.

Therefore, both in the past and recently the socio-political history of Wollo province has never been given due regard. In spite of the fact that Wollo bears elements of both the historically dominant and the historically subaltern of Ethiopia, it has not been provided proper representation by the dominant narrative, as it is not given proper place in the emergent history of the subaltern in Post-1991 Ethiopia.

² Assefa Jaleta. *The Question of Oromia: Euro-Ethiopian Colonialism, Global Hegemonism and Nationalism, 1870s to 1980s*. PhD Dissertation, State University of New York, (1990); Begna Fufa Dugassa. *Indigenous Knowledge, Colonialism, and Epistemological Violence: The Experience of the Oromo People under Abyssinian Colonial Rule.* Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, University of Toronto, (2008); Tessema Ta’a. *The Political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia from the Mid16th to the Early 20th Centuries*. PhD Thesis, Michigan State University, (1986); Assefa Jaleta. *Oromia and Ethiopia: State formation and Ethno-national Conflict 1868- 2004*, The Red Sea Press Inc. Asmara. 2005; Mohammed Hassen. *The Oromo of Ethiopia, A History 1570-1860*. Cambridge, 1980.

*When I say southern Oromo, I do not mean that Wollo is a northern Oromo province.

Andrew Caplan better explains Wollo's marginalization. He mentions that: "Wollo was an area that did not inspire confidence: to the Christians it was Muslim; to the highlanders, it was "Galla"; to [the north] Tigreans it was Southern; to [the south] Shewans it was Northern."³ The lacuna of knowledge in the political history of Wollo in particular and the radicalized Ethiopian historiography in general, deserves thorough academic engagement.

Hence, this project is intended to investigate why, how and in what way Wollo has been neglected from the country's political ground and historical narration. In doing so, the study will try to reconstruct the social and political history of the province in the period under study. Since history is an argument without end, there is always a need for reconstruction. As Pieter Geyl suggested historical hypothesis must always remain "tentative and corrigible"⁴. According to post-colonial writers, existing histories are partial due to two reasons: firstly, they have represented only one small part of an infinitely complex whole; and secondly, that part itself has been narrowly interpreted.⁵ Therefore, this study is a detailed reconstruction of the socio-political history of Wollo province between 1769 and 1916. The study also explores major historical events that took place in Wollo that shaped the socio-political atmosphere of the province vis-à-vis the late nineteenth and early twentieth century political history of Ethiopia.

I think this study will be a good reference for very recent political developments in Ethiopia. Following the current political change in the country, a rivalry between Amhara and Oromo

³ Andrew Caplan, "British Policy towards Ethiopia, 1909 to 1919". PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1971, p.49

⁴ Pieter Geyl, *Use and abuse of history*, Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1979, p. 70

⁵ Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why- Ancient, Modern, and Post Modern perspectives*. New fetter Lane: London, 1996, p.100

nationalists is seen upon the identity of Wollo. Both tries to pull Wollo towards their ideology.⁶ Thus, this study can contribute in presenting the socio-political set up of the province in the period under study.

Sources and Methodology

Even though the study was based at at university of the Western Cape in South Africa, the sources for the research were collected in Ethiopia, particularly in the Southern and Northern Wollo zones.⁷ I conducted field research and data collection in Ethiopia during the period of January to July 2017, with an additional field trip during April to August 2018. In Ethiopia, I retrieved the major libraries and collections of the country: the National Library and Archival center of Ethiopia, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and the French Center for Ethiopian Studies, and the libraries of Addis Ababa University. From these centres, I collected as many sources as possible. I also visited government and church owned museums in Wollo such as *Ayteyef*, the court of *Negus* Mikael of Wollo, Dessie Museum; the church museums of Tenta Mikael, Tedbabe Maryam, and the Monastery of Hayq St Stephen.

The sources to write this study include primary sources such as hagiographies, chronicles, traveller accounts, diaries, autobiographies, archives, and manuscripts available at different archival centres. Secondary sources such as books, BA and MA theses, PhD dissertations, journals, articles, magazines, and newspapers, oral traditions, folk-tales, proverbs and the like

⁶ By tracing the Oromo presence in Wollo during the sixteenth century, a group of nationalist Oromos tend to claim Wollo to be an Oromo province. Their counterparts, the Amhara nationalist, who recall Bete Amhara,” the pre Oromo Wollo strongly oppose this prerogative. They have asserted Wollo to be an Amhara province. The later mentions the current composition of Wollo as an Amhara province in Amhara region.

⁷ Currently, particularly in the post 1991 sturcture of the Federal Ethiopian state, Wollo is found in the Amhara region, one of the nine regional states. Moreover, the formerly Wollo province is divided into four zones; North Wollo, South Wollo, Wag Himra and Oromia zone-a special zone in Amhara region which is settled by Oromos

were also extensively used.

Archives I used for this study include letters and documents available in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian national archives and library agency. These included letters from the central government (Addis Ababa) to different regional governors and from regions to the center. Though many of the earliest archives and letters are written in Ge'ez language, my ability to read, understand and interpret the language was invaluable help. Moreover, British Foreign Office Records, reports of British ambassadors in Ethiopia, which are preserved in microfilm at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies further contributed to this study.

Other important sources for this study were chronicles. The chronicles consulted for the purpose of this study include the royal chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840, the chronicle of Emperor Tserse Dingle, the chronicle of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1867) by *Aleqa Zeneb*, the chronicle of Emperor Yohannes (1871-1889), the chronicle of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) by *Tsehafe-Tezaz*⁸ Gebre-Selassie⁹ and *Lij Iyasu's* (1913-1916) chronicler, Gebre-Egziabher Elias,¹⁰ have given valuable information regarding the period under study.

A further category of sources useful to this study was the autobiographies of contemporary individuals; sources that especially, for the last two chapters, were particularly useful. In an Ethiopian historical study memoirs of such individuals are considered primary sources. To mention but few, *Ras Imeru Haile-Sellasse*, the contemporary and friend of *Lij Iyasu*, who

⁸ *Tsehafe-Tezaz* was a title given to the Chroniclers of the Emperors of Ethiopia

⁹ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, *Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek Neguse Negest Ze Ityopeya* [The History of the time of Menilek King of Kings of Ethiopia], (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 E. C)

¹⁰ Gebre-Egziabher Elyas, (trans. & ed. Molvaer Reidulf), *Prowess, Piety, and Politics. The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia 1909-1913*, (Köln: 1994)

worked as a distinguished official during his lifetime. His memoir *Kayehut Kemastawsew (From what I Saw and Remember)* which is published recently is essential to understand early twentieth century Ethiopia, including Wollo in the post Segelle period. The account of Mersé-Hezen-Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: YeZeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922. (The Turn of the 20th Century: My memory from What I Saw and Heard)* and Tekle Hawariat's autobiography, which covers the first three decades of the twentieth century, are therefore, very important sources for this study. Personal memories of contemporary notables such as *Aleqa* Lema and Atseme Giorgis are also employed. Similarly, European travellers who visited Ethiopia generally and Wollo province specifically before and during the period under study provided useful information for the study of the socio-political history of the province.

The sources dealing with the study of the socio-political history of Wollo include theses and dissertations. Theses of students from Addis Ababa University on different localities have been consulted for different purposes in this study. Supplementary important sources of this study are books and journals written by professional historians. The works of different scholars, mainly from the fields of History, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Political Science and Economics, have been consulted. Moreover, periodicals, newspapers, and magazines were also used.

To fill the gap and authenticate the sources used, oral testimonies were collected from the places sources were collected. During my field work, I interviewed a dozen of people in different districts of Wollo: in Dessie, Yejjju, Lasta, Raya, Ambasel Boru Meda, Wore Illu, Wore Himeno, Sayint, Meqdala and in some parts of Shewa: Addis Ababa, Debre Berhan and Segelle. The

procedure involved individual and group interviews that ranged from a few minutes to three hours in length. Those interviews were then cross-checked with written sources.

Oral sources and proverbs provided the most vital complement for this study. African and Africanist historians have debated the value and reliability of oral evidence for the reconstruction of the history of African peoples. Their weaknesses as a source of historical reconstruction have been argued as being no worse than those of other sources of history, including written records. In this regard, Jan Vansina, who is regarded as the major innovator in the historical methodology of oral history, asserted that the oral tradition can be a viable source for writing African history. Notwithstanding Ethiopia's reputation for an ancient tradition of literacy, until relatively recently the ability to read and write was limited to a small percentage of the population. Fortunately, the communities of Wollo have a tradition of preserving their memories in proverbs and popular verses. Thus, allowing for a wide use of oral traditions.

The method which suits to study the socio-political history of a region in a distant time is qualitative method. Hence, the data collected was investigated and descriptively analysed.

Structure of the Study

My study focused on the political history of Wollo from 1769 to 1916. The period of study was a landmark in the history of the region. 1769 marked the rise of Wollo as a dynasty and 1916, the fall of Wollo as the center of Ethiopian politics.

The study consists of seven chapters. The introductory chapter gives a short highlight of selected theories and concepts on exclusion and historical narration in the past. It also tries to show the place given to Wollo in the historiography of Ethiopia.

Chapter two, “General Geographical and Historical background” delves into the geographical, and historical circumstances of the province. It deals with its physical feature, climate as well as its natural resources. It also gives a comprehensive backdrop on the people of the province, including religious expansion, and population movements that later resulted in the multi-cultural nature of the province on the one hand and its exclusion on the other hand.

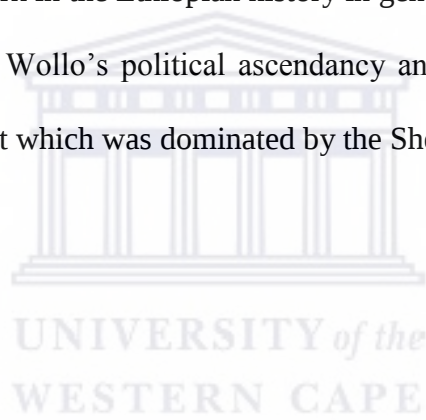
Chapter three, which covers the period 1769 to 1855, deals with the general political developments within the country, and of Wollo particularly. It elucidates political developments in the region, such as the establishment of local dynasties in Wollo, and the strength of these dynasties. It further highlights the dominating imperial politics which saw Wollo as a region of “usurpers” due to ethnic, religious and political grounds.

Chapter four, “Political and religious consolidation in Wollo”, focuses on the incorporation of Wollo into the mainstream political life by the political and religious consolidation policy of Emperors Tewodros and Yohannes who started the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire. The main element of the chapter will outline the transformation of Wollo from Muslim dynastical domination to Christian imperial rule which resulted in the weakening disintegration of Wollo local dynasties. In the process, the resistance the Wolloyes made, and the reaction the emperors took upon them will be detailed.

Chapter Five details the socio-political situations in the province in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries particularly under its leader *Ras* later *Negus* (king) Mikael, who is regarded as a strong leader who brought Wollo to its former glory and centrality. The chapter also assesses political developments of the time which transformed Wollo from being a buffer zone to a political center.

Chapter Six explores the growth in the political position of Wollo province when *Ras Mikael* was appointed as king of the North (Northern part of Ethiopia) and his son *Lij Iyasu* was designated to be an heir of the Imperial throne of Ethiopia. It also details with how and in what ways Wollo's position was challenged by the Shewan ruling elites. The power rivalry between the ruling elites of the two political strong provinces of the time; Shewa and Wollo, and the deposition of *Lij Iyasu* from power after the two provinces fought at the battle of Segelle will also be addressed.

Chapter Seven outlines the socio-political situation of Wollo province in the post-Segelle period. The battle of Segelle is a landmark in the Ethiopian history in general and the history of Wollo in particular. It brought to an end Wollo's political ascendancy and put it under the more direct control of the central government which was dominated by the Shewan aristocrats.



1.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Frame Work

History has been written by winners for their, self justificatory purposes, and that in particular it has been written by spokespeople of imperial powers, and of the dominant nations. As a result, the history which had been recorded has been derived from a specific ideological perspective, while the greater part of what has

happened in the past, has been left well alone and out of sight, ignored or not comprehended or simply not noticed.¹¹

In his view cited above, Southgate underlined that history is always written by the winners. Similarly, Sahoo criticized that “the history written till now is one-sided, partial and not showing the true picture of the low-level group in society.”¹²

In many countries and societies, while the ruling elite dominated the historical narration, the governed, who they regarded as their subjects had been marginalized from the historiography of their country.

Rene Lenoir, the French social scientists and one of the pioneer proponents of the concept marginalization has defined the term as the “rollover” of certain disadvantaged groups into a lower hierarchy in a social network system.¹³ According to John Scott and Gordon Marshall, marginalization is “a process by which a group or individual is denied access to important positions and symbols of economic, religious, or political power within any society.”¹⁴ Marginalization can also be defined as “a complex and multidimensional process which involves the lack, or denial, of resources, rights, goods, and services, and the inability to take part in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas.”¹⁵

¹¹ Beverley Southgate, “History: What and Why- Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern perspectives”. New fether Lane, London (1996: 100)

¹² Abhijit Sahoo, "Subaltern Studies: A New Trend in Writing History", Odisha Review: November – 2014, p.81;

¹³ Rene Lenoir. *Les Exclus Seuil*, Paris, 1974. P.3; Marzanna Farnicka, *Marginalization and exclusion as a violence in society*, 2016, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308778127> Accessed 30 August 2017

¹⁴ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford Press, 1998, p.2

¹⁵ Lamsa, A. L., Cited in Marginalization in Africa: Is the End in Sight? (*Ezine Ed.*), Vol. 15, 2014, p.2 <http://www.noeasyvictories.org/ezine/EZINE-15.pdf>. Accessed: 23 September 2017

Generally, marginalization is the segregation of some groups or regions considered inferior by the groups or regions considered superior in the social, cultural, economic, and political system. It is a course of denying opportunities to those living on the margins by those who are at the center. Marginalization combines discrimination and social exclusion. It offends human dignity; it denies human rights, especially the right to live as equal citizens.

The Italian writer Gramsci referred to those excluded groups as subalterns. He has defined subaltern as “any low-rank person or group of people in a particular society suffering under the hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic right of participation in the making of local history as active individuals of same nation”¹⁶ To Sahoo, a subaltern is someone with a low ranking in a social, political, or other hierarchy. It can also refer to someone who has been marginalized or oppressed.¹⁷ The term is also used to describe someone who has no political or economic power, such as a poor person living under repression.

In history, some powerful regions have emerged and dominated other regions whom they considered inferior. The former ignored, stigmatized and oppressed the later under the pretext of various social and political backgrounds. Among these various backgrounds for marginalization are race, class, caste, culture, age, power, religion, and gender.

According to Sunil Kumar, in some countries, marginalization is related to the social conditions emerging from the status of specific castes or classes. Members of these castes or classes are born into a situation of inferior status and are, therefore, being marginalized. Also, in many other

¹⁶ El Habib Louai “Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications”. *African Journal of History and Culture (AJHC)* Vol. 4(1), January 2012, p.5

¹⁷ Abhijit Sahoo, *Subaltern Studies* . . . , p.81

countries, ethnic and religious identity, education, living standards, etc. are, are among the criteria for exclusion.¹⁸ Migration is another factor in which marginalization could occur. In many parts of the world, migrant people have been excluded from several spheres of life by the indigenous people. They are seen as inferior by aboriginals.¹⁹

In what he called “natives’ discrimination against immigrants”, Gorinas suggested that immigrants have been exposed to ethnic, language and even occupational exclusion.²⁰ In the Ethiopian case, as will be addressed in detail in the following chapter, the migration of the Oromo people towards Wollo could be among the factors for the marginalization of the region.

Due to the above mentioned and other socio-economic factors, while nations were marginalized at the global level, communities within nations had also been marginalized at the regional level. Strong regions emerged and dominated those regarded as inferior. In some cases, those regions and groups who were considered as inferior were labelled as barbarians. From the Greco-Roman times to the period of colonialism every civilization has its barbarians.²¹ In the modern Western “civilization” narrative, “barbarians” were commonly identified as the non-Western, non-white, non-Christian natives of the less-developed nations of the world. The Greeks, the inventors of the word ‘barbarian’ applied the term arbitrarily to those people, principally Asians

¹⁸ Sunil Kumar, *Marginalisation and Identity Politics: The Tribal Question in Kerala*, PhD Thesis, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2012 p.13

¹⁹ Debal K. Singharoy, (ed.): *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups: Perspectives and Strategies*, New Delhi: Sage. 2001, p. 33

²⁰ Cédric Gorinas, “Essays on Marginalization and Integration of Immigrants and Young Criminals: A Labor Economics Perspective”, PhD thesis, School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, 2013, p.2; Abhijit Sahoo, *Subaltern Studies* . . . , p.81

²¹ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896 - 1974*, Red Sea Press Inc. 1995, p. 15

who were out of Hellenic culture.²² As Sahoo explained, in the thousands of years of our world's history there existed two kinds of people: Those who considered themselves superiors and those they labelled as inferiors.²³

As examples here is, the caste system in India. The Indian Caste System is historically one of the main dimensions where people in India are socially differentiated through class, religion, region, tribe, gender, and language. Individuals and groups have been marginalized on the basis of these factors.²⁴

Another example occurred when the Europeans “discovered” the Americans west, they pushed the Indians to the great plains west of the Mississippi. Indians there were segregated and gathered together on specific pieces of land assigned to them. According to Roy H. Pearce, “these were considered to be savaged islands in the midst of civilized seas.”²⁵

During the period of colonial expansion, European colonizers portrayed the notion of civilization and barbarism in African societies. Europeans concluded that Africans were people without religion, culture, education. Hence, they regarded Africa as inferior, uncivilized and savage.²⁶ As Jana Tschurenne advocated European colonizers who regarded Africa as culturally inferior felt

²² W. R. Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1971, p.378

²³ Abhijit Sahoo, “Subaltern Studies” . . . p. 82

²⁴ Manali S. Deshpande, “History of The Indian Caste System and Its Impact on India Today”, *Senior Project*, California Polytechnic State University, 2010, p.ii

²⁵ Roy H. Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, University of California Press, 1988, p. 239

²⁶ Philip Curtin and et al, *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, London; New York: Longman, 1995, p.5

that it was their duty to ‘civilize’ and uplift the African people. They justified their motive for colonizing Africa as “a moral duty to civilize the barbaric and savage African people”²⁷

Colonial historiography labeled Africa as a continent without history. Western historians argued that Africa had no civilization and thus no history. Margery Perham has mentioned Africa “a collection of primitive tribes with no clothes, no brick wall dwellings, no major historical monument and therefore no history.”²⁸ Likewise, Hegel excluded Africa from his “Philosophy of History” when he writes “Africa has no history.”²⁹

In the task of denying the existence of history in African, colonial historiography declared that before the arrival of Europeans only darkness existed in Africa; and that darkness was not a subject of history. Despite the presence of events of a historical nature in African, western writers insisted that such a history is unknown since Africa societies were non-literate as such left no records that historians could study.³⁰ Using the absence of written sources as a yardstick, colonial historiography argued that Africa has no history, because “African past was nothing but darkness.”

Moreover, the traditional historiography was concerned with politics written to serve the interest of the statesmen. Hyden White writes: “prior to the nineteenth century, history was cultivated in profitable combination with *belles-lettres*, serving as the foundation of a pedagogy of virtue and

²⁷ Jana Tschurenay, “Between Non-Interference in Matters of Religion and the Civilizing Mission: The Prohibition of Sutte in 1829.” In: *Colonialism as A Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*. Harald Fischer and Michael Mann (Ed.), 2011, p. 71

²⁸ Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African history: between the syndromes of discovery and abolition*, Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005, p. xi

²⁹ G. W. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Trans. By Hugh B. Nisbet), New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.54

³⁰ Emmanuel Osewe Akubor, “History, the Historian and Historical Society of Nigeria: The Journey so far and the road ahead”, *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, Volume 2 Issue 2 September 2015, p. 73

as a kind of archive of experience useful for statesmen, diplomats, and soldiers.”³¹ According to him, the archives were recorded for the benefit of political elites.

In so doing European colonizers dominated past African narratives. Earlier literatures of European writers on Africa are Eurocentric due to the fact that these writings make Europe and Europeans the subject of history while Africa and Africans are made the object of world history.³² Such narrations further assume that it was only Europeans that could create world events. In relation to this the Guinea-Bissauan writer, nationalist thinker and political leader Amilcar Cabral, in his criticism on the influence of the colonizers upon the history of the colonized, criticized how winners had the power in dominating historical narration and historiography. He writes, “the colonialists have a habit of telling us that when they arrived, they put us into history. That is the contrary. When they arrived, they took us out of our own history. Liberation for us is to take back our destiny and our history”.³³

Since the later twentieth century, the study of African history has undergone radical changes. Particularly, after 1960, a paradigm shift towards new African historiography had taken place. African historians responded to the colonial historiography by demonstrating that Africa had a glorious past. In this regard, Nigerian historians took the lead in the production of academic knowledge about the African past in the context of “decolonization”. Pioneer Nigerian historians such as Kenneth Dike, Yusuf Bala Usman, Abdulahi Smith, Ahmadu Belo, and other African historians played a great role in bringing a shift of paradigm in African historiography.³⁴

³¹ Hayden White, “Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality”, *The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Taylor & Francis Group, Ltd Vol. 9, No. 2005, p. 149

³² Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why . . .*, p. 101

³³ What is History: A New Approach to History for Students, Workers, and Communities, Published by Skotaville Educational Division, Johannesburg, 1987: 1

³⁴ Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African history . . .*, p. xi

Moreover, the establishment of new schools of African historiography such as the Ibadan School of history brought about a change in approach on African historical studies. Also, the appearance of several journals after 1960 such as: the *Journal of African History* and the *Journal of Modern African Studies* created scientific spaces in the study of African historiography.³⁵

In addition to African historians, other post-modernist historians, and writers of Southern Asia, particularly India played a major role in bringing a shift of pattern in historiography. The American historian in the tradition of literary criticism, Hyden White, in his famous work *Metahistory* argued that the works of the philosophers of the nineteenth century, particularly Hegel are different from the works of post-modernist writers both in emphasis and content.³⁶ The focus and scope of history have changed from politics to culture from the grand historical narrative to microhistory.

Such efforts resulted in the beginning of a 'New African Historiography'. Unlike the traditional paradigm which was concerned with politics, the 'New History' has come to be concerned with every human activity. The New history is history written in deliberate reaction against the traditional paradigm.³⁷ According to Jacques, the new historiography has two distinguishing features; one is affirming the existence of a glorious past in Africa, and the other is reproducing historical knowledge.³⁸

Africanist and post-modernist writers such as White condemned the over-reliance on written sources and encouraged the use of Oral, Archeological, Linguistics and other sources for historical reconstructions. Thus, emerging African scholars and post-modernist writers rejected

³⁵ Emmanuel O. Akubor, *History, the Historian . . .*, p. 73

³⁶ Hyden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975, p. xi

³⁷ Peter Burke (Ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Politi Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 3

³⁸ Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African history . . .*, p. xi

the privileging of written sources. They adopted the disciplined, rigorous, and corroborative use of a variety of sources and multidisciplinary methods from archaeology, ethnography, anthropology, linguistics, and art history to oral traditions.³⁹

Another approach of writing history which has mainly developed in India is referred to as “Subaltern Studies.” In India, the subaltern studies is supposed to be critical writing of new history. As Mandal and Karan mentioned, subaltern study gives a chance to the dominated and oppressed people to write their own history.⁴⁰ One of the pioneer proponents of the subaltern study, Guha, also criticized that “the historiography of India has for a long time been dominated by elitism-colonialist elitism and bourgeoisie nationalist elitism.” He further mentioned that colonial historiography failed to recognize the role of the people in the making and development of their nationalism.⁴¹ In the opinion of Edward Said, subaltern studies is a counter reaction for Indian history which had been written from a colonialist and elitist point of view. He revisited subaltern approach as an oppositional critic to the “dominant” or “elitist” historiography of India.⁴²

As a result, Guha and other writers tried to write the history of India from the subaltern perspective. These scholars focus on the capacity of the “common people” to make history. Since people constitute the central theme of history, the subaltern approach centers on and around

³⁹ Mamadou Diouf, “Africa in the World”, *Africa Today*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2016, p. 60; Paul, Herman, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. p. 36

Herman Paul described White’s approach as “liberation historiography”.

⁴⁰ Malyashree Mandal and T.Karunakaran, “Origin and Historiography of Subaltern Studies from the West to East”, *an International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal*. Vol. 1, August 2014, p. 187

⁴¹ Ranajit Guha, “Some Aspects of the historiography of Colonial India.” In : *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Ed.), New York : Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 37-39

⁴² Ibid, p. v

people. Thus, the subaltern study is said to have opened a new direction, amplitude, and chapter in reconstructing the history of neglected groups.⁴³

Since Ethiopia is part of the world system with an older history of state formation, similar situations happened in the country. Traditional Ethiopian historiography analysed and interpreted the Ethiopian history only through the lenses of the Solomonic dynasty, usually avoiding local histories and non-Semitic territories. According to many scholars, Ethiopian historiography is said to have been north-centric. Assefa Jaleta suggested that “Ethiopian historiography primarily focused on the Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups of northern Ethiopia and their rulers and ignore the history of the Oromo people.” Bahiru Zewude also added on this that “Ethiopian historians castigated for their neglect of the south”.⁴⁴ It seems because the Ethiopian Empire State, which in its long history referred to as the “Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia”, is limited to the northern and central part of the country. The northern provinces of Gonder, Gojjam, Wollo, Shewa and Tigray were the heartland of the Empire. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Amharic language and

⁴³ Vinay Lal, “Review: Subaltern Studies and Its Critics: Debates over Indian History”. *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, No. 2001), p. 136; Abhijit Sahoo, “Subaltern Studies” . . . p. 81-84

Recently, history is seen as a necessity. In the words of Marwick “Individuals and societies could scarcely exist if all knowledge of the past was wiped out. As memory is to the individual, so history is to the community or society.” In his scholastic work, *On the Use and Abuse of History*, the nineteenth-century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche denotes “Every person and every people according to its goals, forces and needs, uses certain knowledge of the past, sometimes as a monumental history, sometimes as an antiquarian history, and sometimes as a critical history. According to him, history is essential to the person who loves looks back in the direction from which he has come, for the person who wants to preserve the condition under which he comes into existence for those who are to come after him. Available evidence has shown that it is through a sense of history that communities establish their identity. For that matter, many recent historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods to study societies’ history. Arthur Marwick (2nd Ed), *The nature of history*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p.14; Friedrich Nietzsche (Trans. by Ian C. Johnston), *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, 1874, p.10; Michel Foucault (Trans., Smith, A M Sheridan), *The archaeology of knowledge*, London : Tavistock, 1974, p. 3

⁴⁴ Asafa Jalata, “The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies.” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1996, p. 95; Bahru Zewude. “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography”, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (November 2000), p.10

script and many elements of the social system of the country derived from these regions. Most of the emperors of Ethiopia came from those provinces.⁴⁵

In those imperial systems, there existed two kinds of people or classes: superior and inferior. As a result, in Ethiopia, the two semitic-speaking groups, the Amhara and Tigre had been politically dominant ones.⁴⁶ There were also groups and peoples who were regarded as savages. Among these groups are the Oromo, the Agaw, Muslims and the Ethiopian Jews. Teshale Tibebu categorizes the barbarians of the Ethiopian society, (in which he reckons the Geez civilization) into three categories as: Pagans, the Bete Israel (Ethiopian Jews) and Muslims.⁴⁷ The Oromo were seen as pagans in some instances and Muslims in others. In many of the recordings of Medieval and early modern Ethiopian history, the Oromo were seen as “Savages.” For that matter, a derogatory name, “*Galla*”, was given to them.

Moreover, Islam in Ethiopia has long been a neglected and marginalized subject in Ethiopian studies. In his chapter on the history of Islam in Ethiopia, John Abbink states that “despite its ancient history roots in the country, Islam in Ethiopia has always been a religion with secondary and in the eyes of many Ethiopian leaders’ inferior status, and often suffered from suppression and discrimination.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ David Talbot, *Contemporary Ethiopia*, The Hallmark Hubner Press Inc., New York, USA, 1952, p. 27)

⁴⁶ It does not mean that the Amhara and Tigre peasants were privileged. The peasants in these areas were also tributaries of their landlords as peasants of other regions did. They did not have special honour of being an Amhara or Tigre.

⁴⁷ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, . . . p. 15

⁴⁸ Jon Abbink, “An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of Identity and Politics”, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1998, p. 113

Wollo is an innocent victim of historical lacunae, because of the presence of the Oromo and Islam, two subjects on the margins of Ethiopian history. Sunil Kumar's explanation fits the situation of Wollo during the period under study. He writes that “marginalization is a changing phenomenon linked to many socioeconomic factors and conditions. Individuals or communities might enjoy high social status at one point in time, but as social change takes place, so they would lose this status and become marginalized.”

Despite its geographical location in the heartland of the country, Wollo was regarded as an Oromo province due to the socio-political developments during the sixteenth century and onward. As a result, Wollo has been marginalized from Ethiopian historiography.⁴⁹ In much of the recently recorded literature on the Oromo, the internal events of Wollo are ignored. Those recordings considered Wollo as part of the Amhara province.⁵⁰

In spite of the political exclusion and historical marginalization, the different ethnic and religious groups in Wollo lived together interacting and intermingling among each other. This led to the emergence of common customary and cultural practices that enabled the society to live in peaceful coexistence. But this mixture and intermingling was not seen as strength rather a weakness. There was a tendency of accusing the Wollo societies to be relaxed or “superficial” in their religious practices. So, both during past and present the socio-political history of Wollo province has never been given its due regard.

⁴⁹ Brian J. Yates, “Invisible Actors: The Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1913)”, PhD Dissertation: The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (2009), p. 1

⁵⁰ Ibid , p.118

1.2. Wollo in Ethiopian Historiography

ራሴን ወገሴን ብሎ ሳይናገር

ሞቶ ተቀበረ ወሎን ያክል አገር⁵¹

Without letting know its sickness

The great region Wollo has died and buried

By the time the autonomy of Wollo came to an end following the battle of Segele, Mikael, in 1916, the people expressed their ill-feeling in popular verses. The verse above depicts Wollo province as a respected person who died and got buried. The verse further indicates the end of the autonomy of Wollo and its failure under the direct control of the Shewan nobility. A province which once was the center of Abyssinian government and part of the historically dominant groups later was excluded from the central Ethiopian politics and historical narration due to politics.

Wollo is a region in the north-eastern part of Ethiopia. Its geostrategic central position and the unique nature of ethnoreligious alchemy has made it a historical focal point of historical dynamics in Ethiopia. The history of Wollo is closely linked to the dynamics of the Ethiopian state building project through the historical quest for access to the sea and the rivalry of the provinces. On account of these, major historical battles among political, social and religious forces occurred in the region leaving a mark on it, and the nature of the Ethiopian state.

⁵¹ Gobeze Tafete, *Abba Tena Iyassu*. 1996 Addis Ababa, p. 143; Misganaw Tadesse. "The Life and Contributions of Negus Mikael of Wollo". MA Thesis, Bahir Dar University: Department of History: (2012), p. 34

Before the sixteenth century, Wollo had been a center of history, political administration, religion and religious education. To mention but few, it was a center of state at different times. When the Axumite Empire was pushed south-ward due to internal and external challenges, it changed its centre to a place called Kubar in Angot, which is in the present-day Wollo.⁵²

Following the collapse of Axumite Empire, the Zagwe dynasty succeeded in taking state power and made its center at Lalibela, in the north-western part of Wollo. During the medieval period, *Bete Amhara*, the southern part of Wollo was made a center of the state. Contemporary writers mentioned that the region has at different historical periods become the residence of kings. Emperors Naod (r. 1494 -1508) and Lebne Dingel (r.1508-1540) built their palaces in the area, and administered the country from there.⁵³

It is also a province in which the two major religions of Ethiopia, namely, Orthodox Christianity and Islam are deeply rooted; with most of the older shrines of the country found there. Lalibela, the wonderful rock-hewn church which is the biggest tourist attraction site in Ethiopia and Jema-Negus, the old Islamic shrine are typical examples in this regard.⁵⁴

The Treaty of Wuchale, which caused the battle of Adwa between Ethiopia and the colonial Italy, was signed at Wuchale in Wollo. Wuchale is another example in the thought that Wollo's location in the central region of Ethiopia is said to have been a reason why major events occurred there. As a result, Wollo has been regarded as a theatre of social and political engagements:

⁵² Jean Doresse, *Ethiopia: Ancient Cities & Temples*. Elek Books: London, 1959, p. 25

⁵³ Paul Lester Stenhouse (Trans), *Futuh Al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia (Futuh Al-habasa)* by Sihab ad-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Qader, Tsehai, Publishers, 2003, p. 44

⁵⁴ Aster Mulu, "Continuity and Change among the Traditional Singers of Wollo", PhD Dissertation (Addis Ababa University: Department of Journalism and Communication) 2015, p. 76

population movements, ethnic interactions, political rivalry, religious expansion and persecution, and the like.

Here, I mention two events that shaped the socio-political atmosphere of Wollo province and which are responsible for its marginalization. These events, which took place in the sixteenth century, are the expansion of Islam and the Oromo population movement towards the province.⁵⁵

The expansion of Islam during this period was made through the war of aggression. Especially, during the civil war of 1529-1543 between the Christian Highland Kingdom under Emperor Lebne Dingel and the Muslim sultanate of Adal under Imam Ahmed, popularly known as Ahmed Gragn (which means *Ahmed the left-handed*). The sultan of the Adal expanded the Islamic religion in Wollo province. In this civil war, many churches and monasteries were demolished and a number of Christians killed. In addition to the destruction, Imam Ahmed is said to have left many preachers in various part of Wollo province to propagate Islam among the indigenous population.⁵⁶ This resulted in the domination of Islam in Wollo. After Ahmed Gragn, Wollo became a predominantly Muslim area, more than any other central and Northern provinces of the country. Nevertheless, the Christian population remained as the substratum of the area.⁵⁷

The other event is the expansion of Oromo, the largest ethnic group of Ethiopia, over a vast area of Ethiopia. One of these provinces settled by the Oromo people is Wollo. Wollo was named after the largest Oromo group who settled there.⁵⁸ After they controlled Wollo, the new settlers

⁵⁵ Brian J. Yates, "Invisible Actors" . . . , p. 61

⁵⁶ Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo, Ethiopia reform and reaction*, (Leiden: Boston university, 2001), p. 112

⁵⁷ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wollo: 1855-1908". B.A. Thesis. Department of History, Haile Selassie I University, 1972, p. 1

⁵⁸ Asnake Ali, "Aspects of the Political History of Wollo: 1872-1916," MA Thesis (Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1983E.C), p. 1

renamed the different districts of the province after the name of their clans. They controlled and exercised political power over the province until the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Early movements of the Oromo towards the frontiers of Amhara heartland province of Wollo was seen as a threat against the Christian kingdom. After their arrival in the highlands, they were feared by the *Habesha*, the northern Christian people of the empire. The rank given to the expanding Oromo by the northerners was that peoples who were fierce and cruel, came to enslave and brutally oppress.⁶⁰ For that matter the outlook given to the Oromo was adverse.

There are two major reasons as to why the Oromos were negatively seen by northerners. The first is the trauma of the legacy of the wars of Ahmed Gagn. As discussed above, the civil war between the Christian Highland Kingdom and the Muslim sultanate of Adal was characterized by destruction and loss of human life. The destruction of churches had devastating consequences not only to the Ethiopian church, but also to Ethiopian society in general. In the Christian highlander tradition, the Imam is remembered as a bloodthirsty interloper. In this regard, Paul B. Henze wrote “in Ethiopia, the damage which Ahmad *Gagn* did have never been forgotten. Every Christian highlander still hears tales of *Gagn* as a villain in his childhood.”⁶¹

It was by this time when the shock of Islam expansion in the memories of the people that the Oromo expanded over the Christian high land provinces. This created largescale fear of another period of devastation; making the newly expanding people a threat.

⁵⁹ Taye Gabra Maryam (*Aleqa*), *Ye Ityopeya Hezeb Tarik* [The History of Ethiopian People], (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1964E.C, p.63

⁶⁰ Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Borderlands: Essays in Regional History from Ancient Times to the End of the 18th Century*: Red Sea Press, 1997. p. 325

⁶¹ Paul B. Henze. *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*. Hurst & Company. 2002, p. 90

The second reason for the negative attitude towards the newly expanding Oromo, and thereby their marginalization, is the effect of contemporary narrations on the people. These narrations have created damaging connotation to the Oromo people.

The earliest work on the Oromo, the history of the “*Galla*” by Abba Bahrey explicates “I have begun to write the history of the *Galla* in order to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners.”⁶² According to him, the Oromo were brutal, evil and bad. The Scottish traveller, James Bruce, who arrived Ethiopia while the Oromo movement was under progress, described them as “a barbarous and stranger people, hostile to the Abyssinians, and differing in language and religion.”⁶³

Due to narrations such as those the Oromo, especially those who penetrated and settled in Wollo, were feared by the Habesha during the time of their expansion in the highlands in the sixteenth century. They were seen as invaders against the Christian civilization. In the words of Teshale, they were regarded as “Mongolian herders of Ethiopia.”⁶⁴

It seems to me that due its domination by Islam and the Oromo caused Wollo to be marginalized by the political elites of the north. In many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century recordings, Wollo had been described as a “*Galla*” and an Islamic province. Ethiopian royal chronicles and traveler accounts also defined Wollo as a province infected by the permanent stain of “*Galla*” while describing the northern provinces of Begemder, Gojjam, and Tigray as pure Habesha

⁶² Aba Bahrey, “History of the *Galla* of Ethiopia”, In: C.F Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford (Eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646*. Kraus Reprint Limited, 1993, p.44

⁶³ James Bruce, *Travels to discover the source of the Nile, in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773: in five volume*, Vol 3 Edinburgh: Printed by J. Ruthven, for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, London, 1790, p. 54

⁶⁴ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia . . .*, p. 17

provinces.⁶⁵ For instance, among the European travellers who visited Ethiopia during the nineteenth century, Plowden referred to Wollo as the “country of the Galla”. Isenberg and Krapf wrote that: “after half an hour’s walk we entirely left the Shoan territory and entered the territory of the Wollo *Gallas*.”⁶⁶ It is such thoughts and narrations that led to the marginalization of the province.

Nevertheless, the northern Oromo of Wollo founded their own dynasties; by the mid-nineteenth century those dynasties were regarded as usurpers for being “Galla” and Muslims nevertheless played a great role in the socio-political arena of the province.⁶⁷

In my opinion, Wollo had been banished from the Ethiopian political ground and thereby excluded from socio-economic conditions and historical narrations in two different stages. The first stage is the campaign of Emperor Tewodros which was made in 1855. Tewodros (r.1855-1868), who started the creation of the modern Ethiopian empire, central ambition was to break the growing power of the provincial rulers and to bring the different provinces under effective central authority.⁶⁸ To fulfil his ambition he made repeated campaigns towards the northern and central provinces of the country. Unlike the campaigns to other provinces, which was done for submission, the campaign against Wollo was not only for submission, but also to eliminate the dynasties who had Oromo and Islam backgrounds and end their dominance over the province. The most significant work of Donald Crummey on the violence of Tewodros states that; “from the beginning, Tewodros’ treatment of the *Galla* in general and the Wollo in particular, differed

⁶⁵ Brian J. Yates, “Acculturation in the Däga: Local Negotiations in Amhara/Oromo Relations”: *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2011, p. 91. Yates mentioned Shewa as

⁶⁶ C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf, *The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf*. London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., (1968), p. 321; Plowden, W.C. *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country, With an Account of a Mission to Ras Ali in 1848* London, (1868), p.172

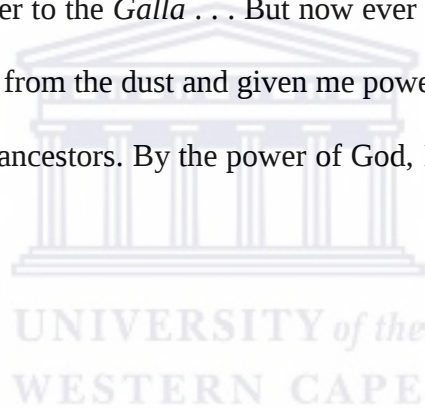
⁶⁷ Tesema Ta'a, “The Place of the Oromo in Ethiopian History” *The Journal Of Oromo Studies* Volume 11, Numbers 1 And 2, July 2004, p.4

⁶⁸ Kofi R.H. Darkwah, *Menilek of Ethiopia*, (London: 1972), p.3.

from his treatment of the Amhara (provinces of Gonder, Gojjam, and Shewa)” coincided with my view of Wollo’s exclusion.⁶⁹

In his letter to Queen Victoria of England regarding his plan of unification in the country and the campaign against Wollo Emperor Tewodros wrote:

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, one God.
King of kings Theodore of Ethiopia, whom God is oneness and in Trinity
has chosen and enthroned. May it reach to Victoria, Queen of England . . .
Since my ancestors, the kings, have until offended our creator, he had
handed their kingdom over to the *Galla* . . . But now ever since I was born
my creator has raised me from the dust and given me power and placed me
over the kingdom of my ancestors. By the power of God, I have dislodged
the *Gallas* . . .”



⁶⁹ Donald Crummey, “The Violence of Tewodros,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.IX, No.2, 1971, p.110

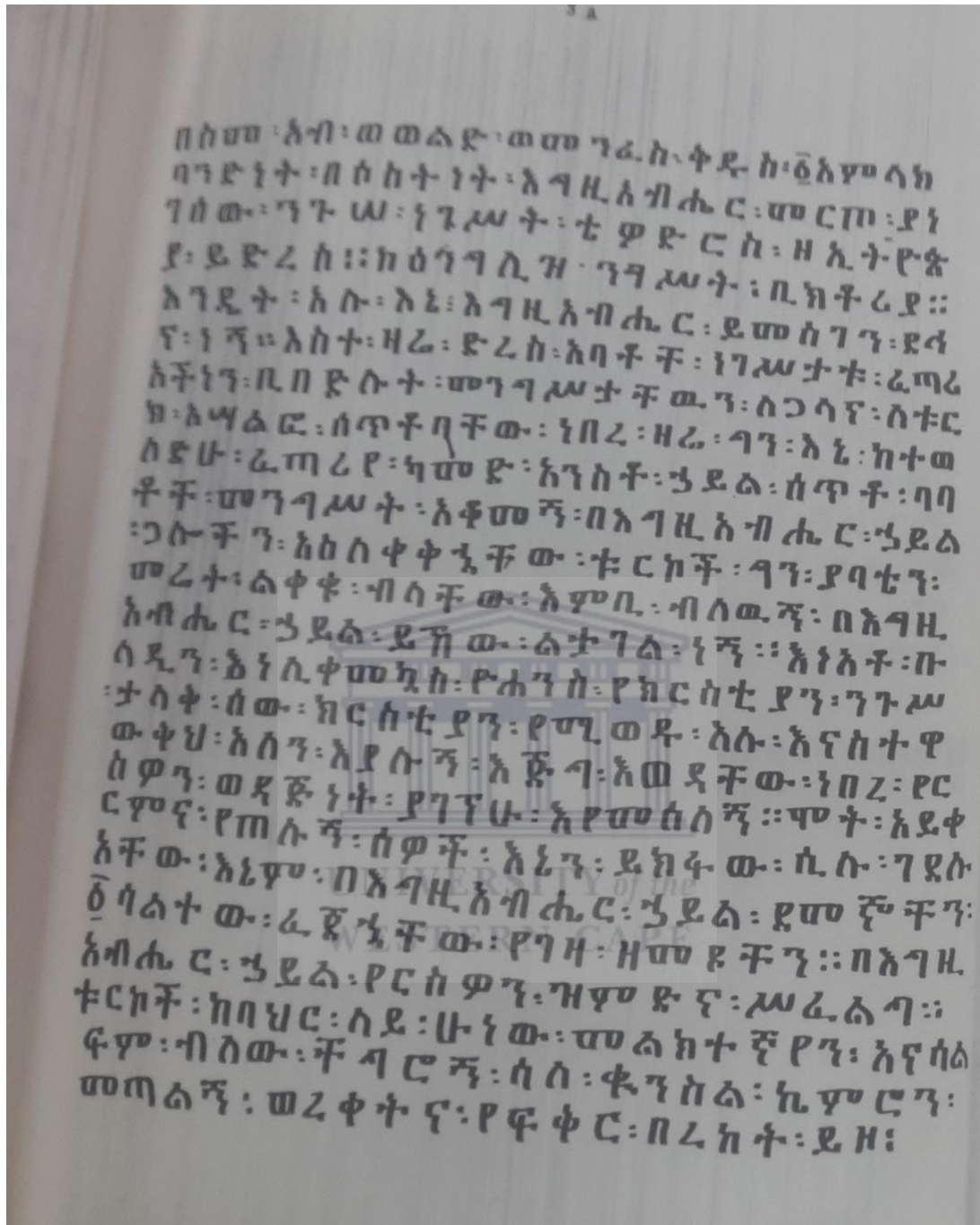


Figure 1. The letter of emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia to Queen Victoria of England [From the Ethiopian National Library and Archival Center]

The control of Wollo by the Oromo was seen as the punishment from God due to the sin of forefathers, their control of political power regarded as an illegitimate act and so that he planned to oust them from power. Following the campaign, the Oromo power in Wollo was significantly diminished, and the dynasties were either weakened or disintegrated.⁷⁰ In relation to this, Hussien Ahmed, the well-known writer on Islam in Ethiopia, summarized: “the resurgence of imperial power in the second half of the nineteenth century, tended to upset the internal balance of power in Wollo and undermine the process of political and cultural integration of its communities.”⁷¹ As a result of the campaign of Tewodros, the identity of those dynasties of Wollo came to an end, chased out of the political arena, and their history overshadowed.

The second phase that led to the exclusion of Wollo from central Ethiopian politics was the political rivalry between the ruling elites of the stronger provinces of Shewa and Wollo. The beginning of the twentieth century is characterized by political dynamics and a power struggle between the Shewan dynasty at the center, and the emerging Wollo province in north-central Ethiopia. After the center of power in Ethiopia had shifted from the north towards the strong traditional province of Shewa by the end of the nineteenth century, the Shewan aristocracy emerged as the most powerful ruling elites in the country. By the end of the nineteenth century, especially following the coronation of Emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913), the center of power in Ethiopia had shifted from the north towards Shewa. As a result, the political power and the center of the government was taken by Shewan nobility.⁷²

⁷⁰ Cherri Reni Wemlinger “Identity in Ethiopia: The Oromo From The 16th To The 19th Century”, MA Thesis: Washington State University, 2008, p. 43

⁷¹ Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo* . . . , p.11

⁷² Harold G Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*. University of California Press, 1994, p.77

During that period, Wollo was integrated by *Ras*, later *Negus* Mikael.⁷³ He brought together those disintegrated administrative entities of the province under one central administration under his own leadership. Wollo also participated in the socio-political and economic conditions of the country, this includes the campaign of Adwa which was fought to defend the country from Italian colonial ambition.⁷⁴

Following the designation of *Lij*⁷⁵ Iyasu as an heir to the throne, Wollo had been transformed to a higher political hierarchy during the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1909, Emperor Menelik II declared to his notables that *Lij* Iyasu, would be his successor.⁷⁶ Accordingly, though never crowned as Emperor, soon after the death of Menilek, *Lij* Iyasu assumed the throne in 1913. Then, Iyasu promoted his father from *Ras* to *Negus*. On 31 May 1914 *Ras* Mikael was crowned as king of Wollo and Tigray provinces. The appointment transformed Wollo from a buffer zone to a political center. After the designation of Iyasu as heir to the throne and his coronation as *Negus*, the political power of Mikael increased more than ever. During the reign of Iyasu, *Negus* Mikael is said to have influenced many political decisions of the government, to such an extent that he was considered a power behind the throne.⁷⁷

⁷³ Mikael, who formerly referred to as Mohammed Ali was a Muslim noble and member of the Mammedoch ruling family of Wollo. Following the declaration of religious uniformity policy by Emperor Yohannes, he was converted to Christianity and was renamed Mikael. He was given the title of *Ras* appointed the governor of Wollo. He established a strong relationship with Emperors Yohannes and Menilek. This paved the way for him to marry Princess Shewarega, the daughter of Emperor Menelik II from whom he born a son, *Lij* Iyasu, the crown prince.

⁷⁴ Misganaw Tadesse, *The Life and Contributions of Negus Mikael of Wollo*. MA Thesis, Bahir Dar University: Department of History, 2012, pp. 43-45

⁷⁵ *Lij* was a title generally reserved for sons of royal family and of the upper nobility

⁷⁶ Emeru Hayle-Selassie (*Ras*), *Kayehut Kemastawsew*[From I have seen and Remembered], (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University press, 2001E.C), p. 55

Lij Iyasu is the son of *Ras* Mikael of Wollo by Menelik's daughter Princess Shewarega Menelik, the daughter of Emperor Menelik

⁷⁷ Wolbert G.C. Smidt, "The coronation of Nagus Mikael in Dase in May 1914: A photograph from the Nachlass Jensen and its Historical Back ground," *In Annales d'Ethiopie*.Vol.XVII, 2001, p.368

Nevertheless, this new development and opportunity for Wollo's revival as a political center was faced with tough resistance, especially among the Shewan nobility. They considered Mikael's promotion together with Iyasu's designation as a threat to their political supremacy.⁷⁸ The appointment had been sought as a direct implication of the transfer of political power from Shewa to Wollo. Consequently, a strong power rivalry was created between the nobilities of the two provinces. In the end, the Shewan nobility who stood to keep the status quo of the millennia-old Christian-Amhara rule were able to remove *Lij* Iyasu from power in 1916. They remain in control of the power in their own hands after defeating Wollo at the battle of Segele.⁷⁹

The justification the Shewan nobility put to depose *Lij* Iyasu was that he had converted to Islam. They even said to have described the deposition of Iyasu as the "removal of a Muslim prince from a Christian throne",⁸⁰ though he was Christian noble. Even at the mobilization order by Shewan ruling elite to fight against the upcoming forces of Wollo, it was declared that "a Muslim invading force was coming",⁸¹ even though Mikael was a devoted Christian king and the majority of the fighters were Christians. Something that was possible due to the image given to Wollo during the preceding centuries as a Muslim and Oromo province.

Writings by the winners in the post-Segelle period appear to be against *Lij* Iyasu and Wollo. The words tend towards a distorted condemnation of the young prince. Below are selected pieces by

⁷⁸ Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p230

⁷⁹ Edward Ullendorf.(Translated), *My Life and Ethiopia's progress 1892-1937*, The Autobiography of Emperor Haylä-Sellasie I, (Oxford Univesity Press,1976), pp. 47-50

⁸⁰ Haggai Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, CO 80301 USA, 2010, p. 5

⁸¹ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: Ye Zeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C. p. 168

Emperor Haile Sellassie, Wilfered Thesiger the then British Ambassador in Ethiopia, and the historian Hagai Erlich serve to illustrate this distortion.

“The Christian faith, which our fathers had hitherto carefully retained by fighting for their faith with the Muslims and by shedding their blood, *Lij Iyasu* exchanged for the Muslim religion and arouse commotion in our midst; in order to exterminate us by mutual fighting he had converted to Islam and, therefore, we shall henceforth not submit to him, we shall not place a Muslim king on the throne of a Christian king; we have ample proof of his conversion to Islam.”⁸²

“Every week offers fresh evidence of *Lij Iyasu*’s sympathy with the Mohamedan religion and with the Moslems whom he goes out of his way to propitiate, even at the expense of politeness to Abyssinian Christians of far higher standing. . . I am coming to the pinion that the heir of the throne of Solomon is at heart a Moslem and is entertaining dreams of one day putting himself at a head of the Mahomedan Abyssinians, who considerably outnumber the Abyssinian Christians, and of proclaiming a Moslem kingdom which will stretch far beyond the frontiers of his present empire. . . . This intention is being probably strengthened by the conviction of an ultimate Turco-German victory.”⁸³

“Menelik’s successor on the throne of Ethiopia, his grandson *Lij Iyasu*, the son of a converted Muslim, himself returned to Islam and apparently aimed, together

⁸² Edward Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress* . . . , p. 48

⁸³ Foreign Office Record 371/2228. Thesiger to Grey, 16 June 1915. Micro-film at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. (Hereafter I will use F.O)

with the Somali Sayyid, to achieve a total revolution in the Horn of Africa and in Ethiopia's identity and structure. He was consequently deposed in 1916 and replaced by a coalition headed by the future emperor Haile Selassie, who would restore Christian hegemony, revive the integration of the Cross and the crown.⁸⁴

Like the earlier recordings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such accounts by the winners in the post-Segelle period had a damaging impact not only on *Lij* Iyasu but also on Wollo. After its defeat at Segelle, by Shewa, the autonomy of Wollo came to an end. Thereafter, Wollo was excluded from the county's power politics.

When the news of the defeat arrived in Wollo the people expressed their sadness with the following verse:

አባ ሻንቆ ማሜ ቤትህ አፈሰሰ

ከከዳኙ ነዉ ወይ ወይስ ሳሩ አነሰ

ከከዳኙም አይደል ሳሩም አላነሰ

እንዲያዉ መሰረቱ ምስሶዉ ፈረሰ

*Abba Shanqo Mamme*⁸⁵ *your house has been leaking*

Is the problem with the thatcher or the grass?

It is neither from the thatcher nor the grass

⁸⁴ Haggai Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn of* . . . , p. 5

⁸⁵ *Abba Shanqo Mamme* was the name given to Mikael, he was named after his horse. Sources explain Shanqo to mean 'black' and attribute it to the color of his horse. Mamme is a shortened form of the name Mohammed, or Mikael

Just the base, the pillar is cracked.

This verse recounts Wollo's failure under the direct control of the Shewans. After the death of Mikael the crown of Wollo was abolished and the province was administered by governor-generals appointed from Shewa.

After its defeat at Segele, the socio-political history of Wollo is said to have got worse. From 1917 till the Italian occupation in 1935 seven Shewan notables were appointed to govern Wollo. The administration of the new appointees is said to have been characterized by extreme repression and rapacious exploitation. With the coming of the new governors, the Wollo nobilities were pushed from their hereditary posts in the provinces and districts of the region. The people of the region who were unhappy with the new appointees refused to accept them. In a district called Legambo, the people are said to have rebelled and killed the newly appointed governor, *Dejjach* Mekuria.⁸⁶ The new rulers are said to have followed harsh socio-economic policies. *Dejjach* Kebede is said to have introduced new types of taxes by which some of them are not usual in other provinces.⁸⁷ This made the economic and social conditions of the people, particularly the peasantry worse. John Abbink also emphasized that "in the twentieth century Wollo lost its former political and economic importance as the political center of Ethiopia shifted south [to Shewa]"⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Abdul Mohammed, "A Biography of Ras Gebrehiwot Mikae 1868-1963", BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 1990, p.42

⁸⁷ Asnake Ali, "The condition of the peasantry in Wollo 1919-1935: A Review of the Tradition", In *Proceeding of the third Annual Seminar of Department of History*, Addis Ababa University, 1986, p.1

⁸⁸ John Abbink, "Transformation of Islam and Communal Relations in Wollo Ethiopia". In *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, Benjamin F. Soares and Rene Otayek (Ed), Palgrave, 2007, p. 68

Generally, after Segele the socio-economic and political conditions were disappointing and characterized by resentment grievance and oppression. The people suffered from multiplied taxation, maladministration and a lack of self-governance. As a result, the people of the province sent a petition to the imperial government. In the petition, they explained what had occurred in Wollo after the battle of Segele and asked for justice and equity.⁸⁹

When the Italians invaded Ethiopia in 1933, Emperor Haile Selassie issued a decree for general mobilization. Following this message was sent to the chiefs and administrators of Wollo to mobilize their people and lead them to the northern front. But the people of Wollo who were dissatisfied with the socio-political situations discussed above showed antipathy for the mobilization order.⁹⁰ From this situation, we can clearly understand what socio-political and economic situations in Wollo look like by the time.

To summarize, in most of the earliest recordings of historically dominant groups, Wollo was not properly represented since it was regarded as a Muslim and “Galla” province. Subsequently, the narration after Segele is dominated by the winners, the Shewan nobility. As a result, the internal events of Wollo have been overshadowed.

⁸⁹ IES MS 4871, Petition of the People of Wollo, Institute of Ethiopian Studies

⁹⁰ Abdul Mohammed, A Biography of Ras Gebrehiwot Mikael . . . , p. 43

The Italians knew that many people in Wollo were disgruntled by Emperor Haile Selassie for deposing *Lij* Iyassu from power and the myriad of problems that this created. The mind-set of mistrust towards the central government, a widespread sentiment that bedevilled the Wolloyes and the supporters of Iyassu in various places, harmed the unity of the country in a significant way (Oral Informants). The Italians seem to have exploited this frame of mind to the full. During the occupation, however, a number of local freedom fighters emerged in different parts of Wollo and they offered strong resistance against the invaders. *Dajjasmach* Mengesha Abuye, *Fitawrari* Legesse Asane, *Fitawrari* Zeleke Maru, *Fitawrari* Tessema Wolde Giyorgis, *Dajjasmach* Hailu Kebede, and *Wagshum* Admasu Wossen were among the renowned patriots

Chapter II

Geographical and Historical Background

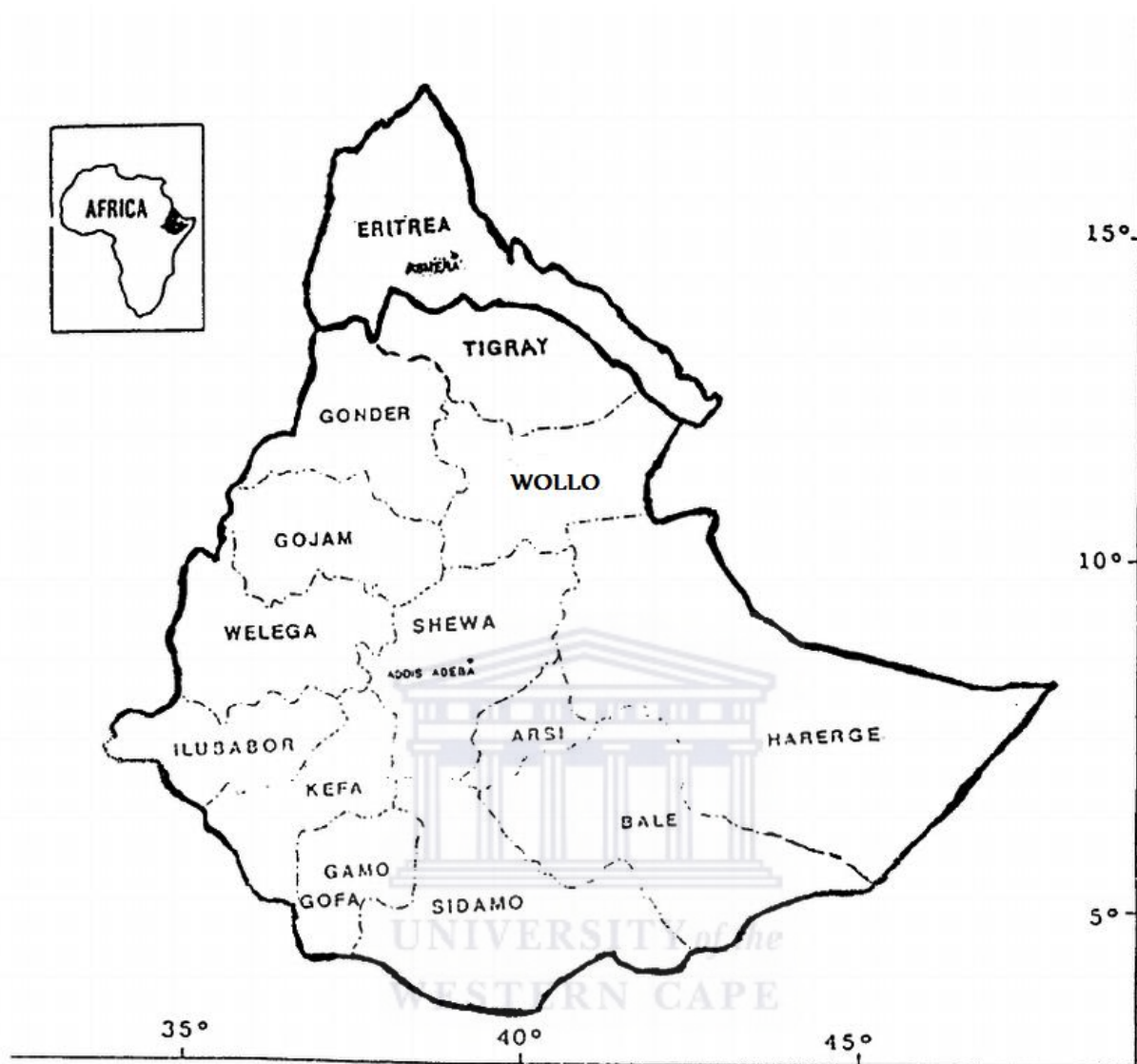
2.1. Geographical Background

The province of Wollo¹ is in the North Eastern hinterland of Ethiopia, a province at the cross-roads of the way to the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Sudan and central and Southern Ethiopia. The corresponding internal provincial forces for the provincial configuration are Eritrea and Tigray along the Red Sea route, Djibouti along the Indian Ocean, Gondar and Gojam to Sudan and Shewa and Southern provinces to the South. It is located at 11° 30' 0" N, 40° 0' 0" E latitude and longitude respectively.

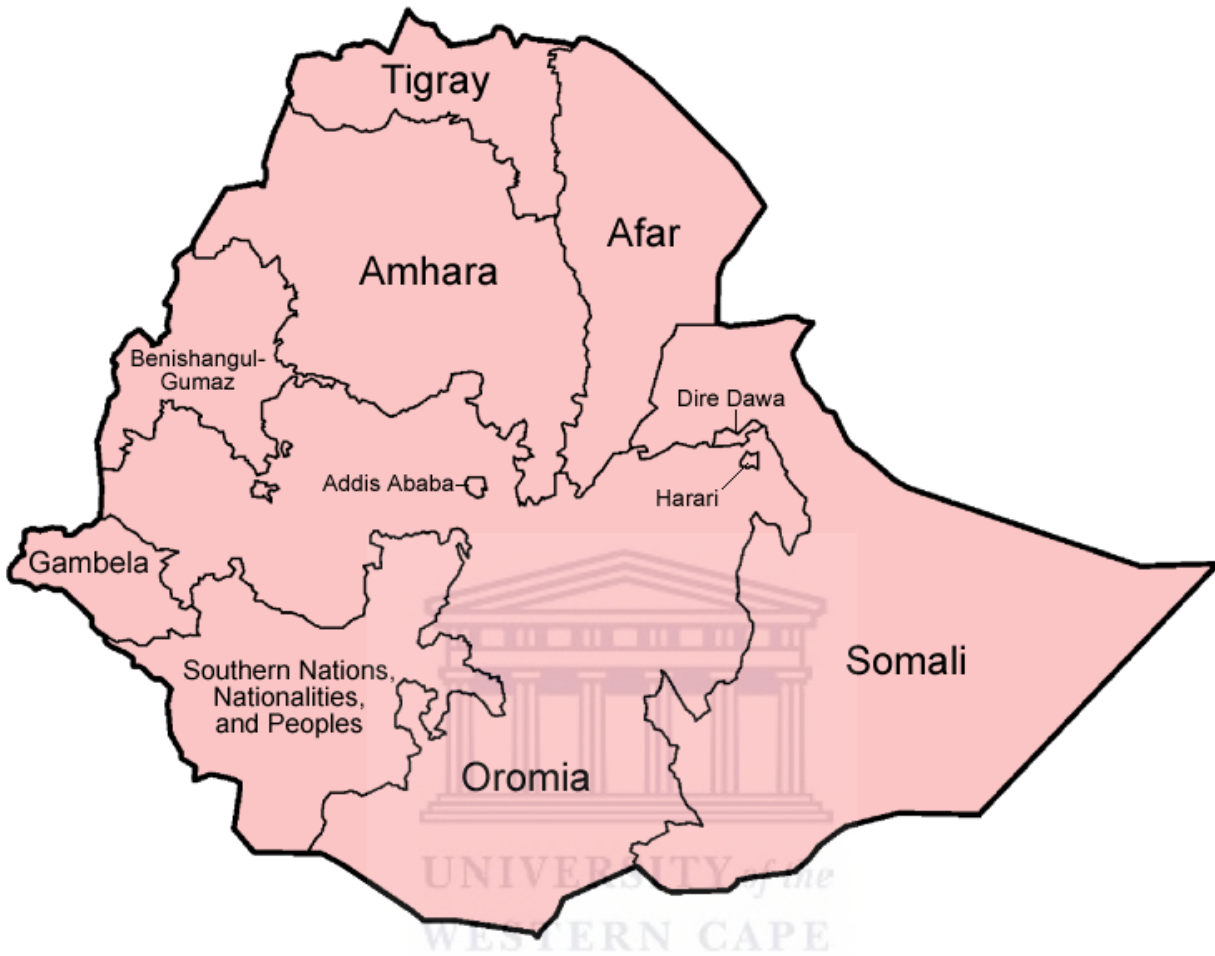
The geographical feature of Wollo is characterized by various physical features. The province is dissected by high mountains and mountain chains, deep ravines, broad gorges and numerous rivers and streams. The great escarpment, stretching north to south, runs through the middle of the province dividing it into two halves. As a result of these diverse conditions, the altitude of the province ranges from the highest peak at Mount *Abuna Yosef*, which is 4,260 meters above sea level, down to the *Dallol* depression which is about 148 meters below sea level.²

¹ 20th century Wollo include the contemporary North and South Wollo zones, Wag Himra zone and Oromia zone (which is settled by Oromos) from the Amhara region, Afar region and some southern parts of Tigray region

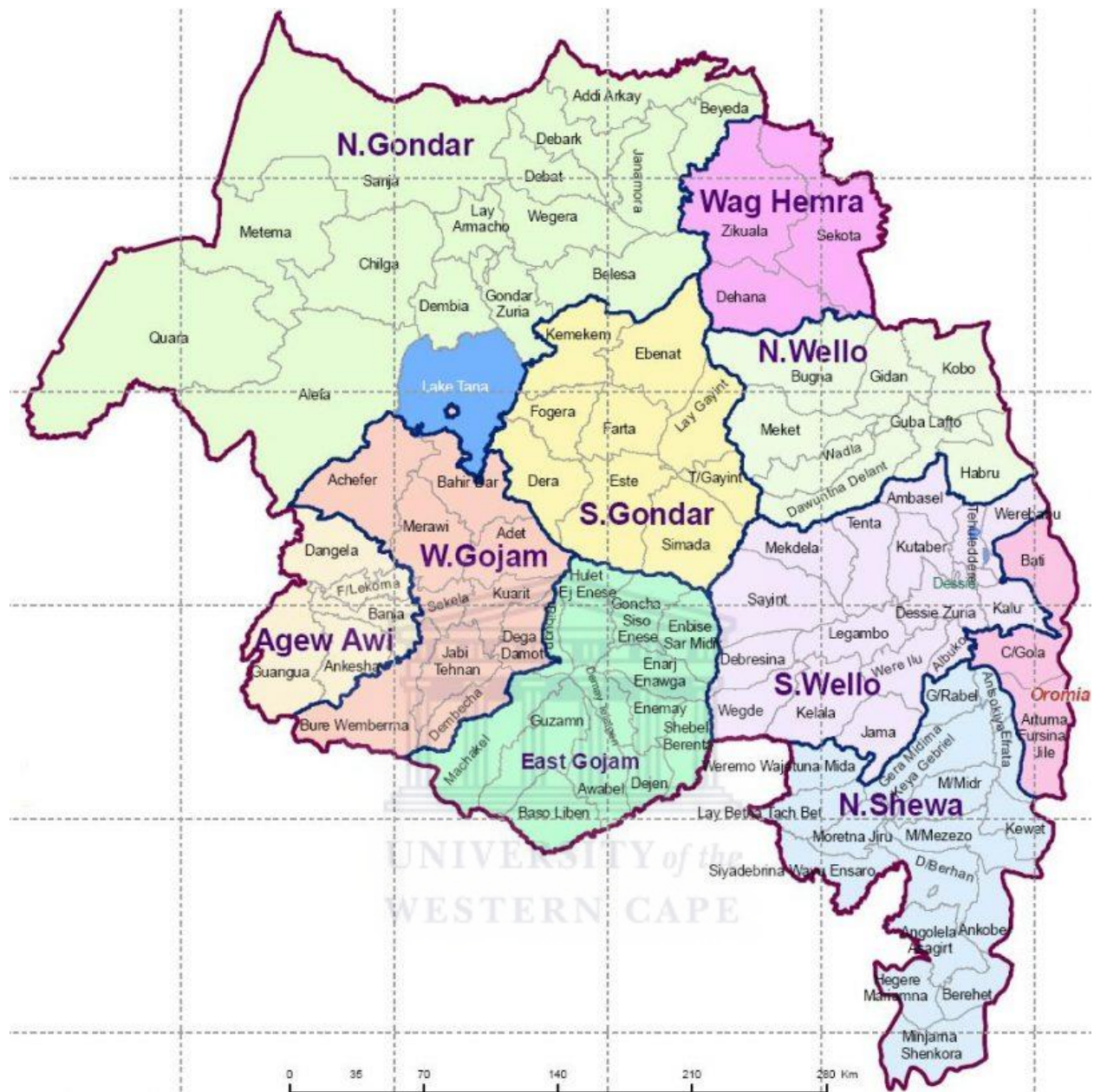
² Dessalegn Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia*. Nordiska: Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 1991, p. 47



Map 1: Map of twentieth century Ethiopia



Map 2: Current map of Ethiopia (Source: Ethiopian mapping Agency)



Map 3: Map of Amhara Region (Source: Ethiopian Mapping Agency)

By and large, the climate of the province is predominantly controlled by altitude. Due to the topographic variation, the province experiences an appreciable variety of climatic types. The

climatic conditions of the province can be categorized based on the five traditional thermal zones namely: *Bereha* (Arid zone), covers the desert lowlands below 500 m, *Kolla* (semi-arid zone), includes those areas with an altitude of 500–1,500 m, *Woina-Dega* (warm temperate zone) covers the temperate highlands between 1,500 and 2,500 meter, *Dega* (cool temperate zone), includes the temperate highlands between 2,500 and 3,200 m and *Wurch* (cool zone) covers highest plateaus above 3200 meters above sea level.³

Rainfall in the province varies from place to place and from season to season. Hence, most parts of Wollo experience two rainfall seasons and a good number of locals follow a bimodal farming system. The two seasons are known as “Belg”, which falls between mid-February to the end of April, and “Meher”, from June to August.⁴

Wollo is drained by major rivers and a number of small streams. While some rivers are seasonal, others are perennial. Most of the rivers are tributaries of the biggest rivers of Ethiopia, Awash and the Blue Nile. The Bashilo River originates just west of Kutaber, flowing first to the northwest then to the southwest to its confluence with the Abay. Its drainage area is about 13,242 square kilometers in size, covering portions of the present-day North Gondar, North Wollo and South Wollo Zones. The Bashilo was also important for defining the boundaries of Ethiopian provinces. In the seventeenth century, it separated Begemder from Amhara.⁵ Its tributaries include the Checheho and Gerado.

³ Getachew Mekonen, *Wollo: Country's Context*. Nigd printing press, Addis Ababa.1984 E.C, p. 14

⁴ Dessalegn Rahmato, *Famine and Survival Strategies*. . . , p. 47

⁵ Balthasar Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, 1710 (LaVergue: Kessinger, 2010), p. 11

Another major river which originates in the highlands of Wollo is the Mille River. It is a major tributary of the Awash. It flows first to the north and then curves to run east to its confluence with the Awash serving as the boundary between Yejjju and Ambasel and lower down for some distance as the boundary between Yejjju and Awusa *Awurajas*, the present-day Afar region. The explorer L.M. Nesbitt, who travelled through the area in 1928, was impressed by its size, and described Mille river as “probably the only real river which joins the Awash”.⁶ Borkana is another major river of central the part of Wollo which is draining eastwards to the Awash River. In the northern most part of Wollo, the big Alawuha River originates in Lasata and flows eastwards serving as a boundary between Yejjju and Raya Qobbo. It is joined by Hormat, Gollina, and other tributaries.⁷ Among the other major rivers of Wollo are Tekeze, Tellare, Gerado, Mi’awa, Chireti, Woleka, and Zita.

Agriculture is the predominant source of livelihood in the study area. It is characterized by both crop production and livestock rearing systems. Almost all the people practiced mixed farming. The chronicler of *Imam Ahmed* and the writer of *Futuh Al-Habesha* (The Conquest of Abyssinia), who visited the area in 1531 during the war of Ahmed Gragh, described the province as “a region of flat arable land standing crops, rivers, and copious rainfall, of wheat and barley.”

8

The major crops cultivated in the region vary according to the climate type. It is the variation in the climate of the region that resulted in the great diversity of the flora and fauna. Crops grow in the Dega area are barley, wheat, oat, peas, horse bean and lentils, with barley as the staple food .

⁶ L.M. Nesbitt, *Hell-Hole of Creation: The Exploration of Abyssinian Danakil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935), p. 201

⁷ Agezewu Hidar. “The political History of Raya Qobbo: 1872-1943”, BA Thesis Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 2000, p. 3

⁸ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p.244

In the Woina-Dega region they grow barley wheat, chickpeas, horse beans, teff, peas, linseed, and lathyrus. There the staple food is teff. Qolla grows teff, sorghum, maize, and paper, and the staple foods are teff and sorghum. Finally in the semi desert and desert parts of Awusa cotton is grown. The livestock rearing of animals include domestic animals such as cattle, pack animals, sheep, goat, and chicken and also camel in the Kolla areas.⁹ Besides, the province is endowed with a variety of trees such as juniper, olive, acacia, and fig. In addition to agriculture, nomadic pastoralism was the principal mode of life of various groups inhabiting the low lands of the province such as Awusa, the eastern part of Raya and south eastern Qallu.¹⁰

Krapf who traveled across Wollo in the 1840s noted that there was a rich cultivation in the region at the time. He added the opinion that the region could accommodate numerous inhabitants possessing considerable wealth. While explaining the wealth of the region he concluded that “the Wollo country is high land, and therefore the temperature is different from that of the southern tribes. These are richer in horses, cattle, and sheep, and grain . . . The people take the greatest care of this animal, feeding it with roasted barley and other food.”¹¹

To look at the geographic extent of some of the medieval historical districts of the province, the mountainous districts of Ambasel and Tehuledere are located at the central part of Wollo. Yejju, which was the center of the *Woresheikh* dynasty,¹² is situated north of Ambasel. Wag and Lasta, the administrative centres of Zagwe dynasty, were the most north-western districts of the

⁹ Getachew Mekonen, *Wollo: Country's Context* . . . , p. 15

¹⁰ Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo* . . . , p. 48

¹¹ Isenberg, C.W and Krapf, J. L., *Journals of the Rev. Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf, missionaries of the Church missionary society, detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa, and journeys in other parts of Abyssinia, in the years 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842*. London: Seeley, 1843, p. 330

¹² Details will be given about the dynasty in the upcoming chapters.

province. To the south of Wag was the historical province of Angot. It is said to have been the largest province in the region stretched from Alamata River in the north to Lake Haik in the south. It includes parts of Raya Qobo, Yejjju, and Ambasel. Much of Angot was mountainous land inhabited by Christian Amhara people who were engaged in farming.¹³

To the South and South West of Angot was the other historical province of Bete Amhara. It stretched from Lake Haik in the north-east towards Amhara-Sayint in the south west. It was defined by rivers Mille and Beshilo in the north, Wanchit River in the south,¹⁴ and by the Abay (Blue Nile) River in the west. It includes the districts of Wore-Himeno, Borena and many other districts which later on were occupied by the Oromo.¹⁵

To the west of Bete Amhara was the district of Wadla-Delanta, surrounded by the district of Lasta in the north, Yejjju in the east, Wore-Himeno and Borena in the South and the neighbouring province of Begemder to the west.¹⁶ The districts of Wore-Illu, Albuko, and Kallu are located in the south. The Afars, who were pastoralists and Muslims, occupied the low land areas of Awusa and parts of Ambasel and Qallu to the East and south and the whole of Awusa. There were also the Semitic speaking Argoba who lives in south-eastern Wollo.¹⁷

¹³ Merid Wolde-Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom 1508-1708 with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and their Consequences", PhD Thesis, University of London, 1971, p. 32

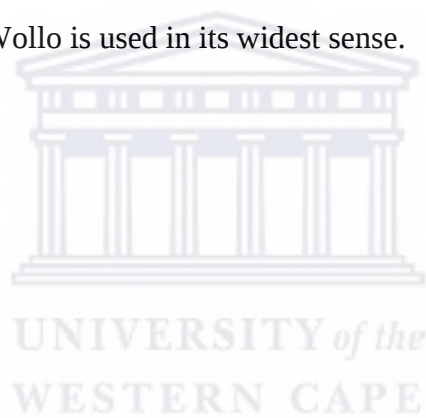
¹⁴ According to the travellers Isenberg and Krapf, Wanchit river is the natural boundary of Wollo and Shewa provinces.

¹⁵ Zergaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Wollo: 1783- 1850." BA Thesis Haile Selassé I University, Department of History, 1973

¹⁶ Israel Arage Zemene, "A History of Wadla Dälanta Awrajja: 1855-1974", MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2011, p. 16

¹⁷ Asnake Ali, "A Historical Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Wollo 1872-1917". In *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1988, p. 263

During the twentieth century, Wollo expanded considerably beyond the historical limits of this territory. It extended to the north to the fringes of Tégray, to the south to Karakore, and in the east to the frontier of Djibouti. By this time, Wollo became one of the fourteen provinces of Ethiopia consisting of twelve *Awrajas* (sub-provinces)¹⁸ and thirty-seven *Woredas* (districts). By this time it was the third largest province of Ethiopia next to Hararge and Sidamo with an area of 75,780 kilometer square.¹⁹ As I highlighted earlier, in the post 1991 structure of the Federal Ethiopian state, the former Wollo province is divided into four zones; North Wollo, South Wollo, Wag Himra and Oromia zone, a special zone in Amhara region which is settled by Oromos. Hence, the study tries to encompass the former extent of Wollo. For that matter, throughout this study, the term Wollo is used in its widest sense.



¹⁸ The twelve *Awrajas* (sub-provinces) were: Wag, Lasta, Raya-Qobbo, Yeju, Wadla-Delanta, Ambasel, Dessie-Zuria, Wore-Himano, Borena, Wore-Illu, Qallu, Awusa

¹⁹ List of Ethiopian Provinces, National Library and Archives of Ethiopia, Folder No. 63.1.2.04

With the adoption of the new constitution in 1995, Wollo was divided between the Afar Region, which absorbed the part of the province that extended into the Afar Depression; the Tigray Region, which absorbed the northwestern corner; and the Amhara Region, which absorbed the remainder of the province in the Ethiopian Highlands.



Map 4: Map of twentieth century Wollo (Source: Dessie Museum)

2.2. Historical Background

2.2.1 Bete Amhara: Wollo Prior to the Oromo settlement

The region which later came to be identified as Wollo, in the post-Oromo population movement, was known as “Bete Amhara” (The House of the Amhara) which means a province of Amharic speaking Christians. It was a central Christian Amhara area.²⁰ The area is claimed to be the origin of the Amhara ethnic group. The *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* mentions Bete Amhara as “a region of historic Ethiopia”.²¹

²⁰ Fekadu Begna . . ., *A Tentative History of Wollo*, p. 1

²¹ Siegbert Uhlig, and Alessandro Bausi. (eds.) *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Vol. 1: A-C. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verla, 2003, p. 230

Regarding its territorial extent, local sources and European travellers who visited Ethiopia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries identified Bete Amhara and its territorial limits. The Portuguese traveler, Francisco Alvarez, who visited the region in the 1520s attested the territorial magnitude of Bete Amhara as it was defined by the Bashilo-Mille river in the north, by the Wanchit (Wahit) river in the south, by the Abay (Blue Nile) river in the west and its eastern limit was the escarpment which was formed the drainages of the Awash River.²²

Ludolphus, in his 1684 account, provides the same identification of Bete Amhara. He wrote that, “it lies almost in the center of Habesha, having on the north the kingdom of Begemder; upon the west, Nile; and beyond that the kingdom of Gojjam, upon the south, it views Woleka and east beholds Angot.”²³

The eminent historian, Merid Wolde Aregay, in his study on the medieval history of Ethiopia remarked that “the boundary of the Bete Amhara began somewhere to the north of Lake Haik, perhaps where the Mille river turns eastward. The full length of the Bashilo river constituted the boundary with Begemder. In the East, Amhara seems to have extended beyond the Zaguol river to include Wore-Illu, the district where the famous churches of Genete Giorgis and Mekane Sellassie were found.”²⁴

When Arab Fakih mentioned the territorial limit of Bete Amhara, he stated that it extended over a distance of twenty days march days of travel from west to east. He also narrates about the gates to the region: “it has five entrances, one gate on the Woleka road, another one on the Aheyya

²² Francisco Alvarez (Beckingham and Huntingford Ed.), *The Prester John of the Indies*, Vol. I, 1961, p. 250

²³ Job Ludolphus, *The new History of Ethiopia*, London, St Paul Churches Yard, 1684, p. 13

²⁴ Merid Wolde-Aregay, *Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom . . .*, p. 35

Fajji²⁵ road, another on the Menz road, a fourth on the Miyat road from the land of the Gigim, and the fifth from the direction of Wassel”.²⁶ When we look at the places which Arab Fakih differentiates as gates to Bete Amahara, the mentioned area is the present-day South Western part of Wollo.

All the above-mentioned sources agreed that the region was bounded by the Nile (Abbay) River to the West, Wanchit River to the south and Mille River to the north. Even in the present rivers Wanchit and Abbay are the boundaries that separate Wollo from Shewa and Gojjam respectively. Generally, the region which was bounded on the west, by the Nile (Abbay) and its tributary the Bashilo River; on the north by Mille River; on the east by the escarpment leading down to the Danakil Desert (Afar); and to the south by the Wanchit River is the present-day south-western part of Wollo province.

Some other sources implied that Bete Amhara was wider than the above explained borderline. According to these sources, Bete Amhara was very wide up to the wars of Imam Ahmed (*Gragn*) it became less by the migration of the Oromo people which followed this invasion.²⁷ Another source indicates that the earliest description of Amhara, refers to a large region, containing several subject provinces, all of which speak Amharic.²⁸

²⁵ Aheyya Feji located at the border of Wollo and Shewa provinces

²⁶ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 219

Wassel is the southern province of Bete-Amhara which is the present day Wore-Illu

²⁷ Tesfaye Mekonen, “The Role of Religion in the History of South Wollo”, BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 1990, p. 12

²⁸ Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, University of Chicago Press, 1974, p.72

To Tekle Tsadik Mekuria, Bete Amhara was a vast region and its area extent run from Begemder to Gidim²⁹ and that after the sixteenth century it became narrower to the southern part of the present-day Wollo. According to him almost all the districts of the twentieth century Wollo were parts of the historical Bete Amhara.³⁰

During the medieval period, Bete Amhara served as a center³¹ of the Ethiopian Empire. Oral and written sources indicated that Emperor Libne-Dingel constructed his palace at a place called Agwa, in Bete-Amhara, now Wollo.³² The ruin of the palace on Emperor Libene Dengel which is found in Wore-Illu district of Southern Wollo is a living witness in this regard. During my field research I took the following photograph.



²⁹ Gidim was a district of the former autonomous kingdom of Shewa

³⁰ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya. *Ye Gagn Ahmed Worera* [The conquest of Gagn Ahmed] Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing press, 1966 E.C., p.374

³¹ Of course, in the long history of Ethiopia, only three important sites had been used as permanent capitals of the central government, namely Axum, Lalibela and Gondar respectively. Most kings of the medieval period used mobile courts instead of fixed capitals.

³² Reidulf K. Molvaer, "The Tragedy of Emperor Libne-Dingil of Ethiopia (1508-1540)". *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p. 30



Figure 2 Ruin of the palace of Emperor Libne Dingel [Photograph taken by the reacher 25/02/2017]

Arab Faqih who visited the region during the reign of Lebne Dingel recognized that Bete Amhara was the residence of the kings of Abyssinia. He further recommended that “no king who reigns over Abyssinia can exercise his rule unless he has been enthroned in Bete Amhara”³³

For that matter, Almeida mentioned Bete Amhara as “the center and the heartland of the whole Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Empire”.³⁴ Ludolphus also said “Amhara is now the noblest kingdom of all Ethiopia, by reason of the inaccessible fortified rocks, the royal prison of Amba Gishen”³⁵

³³ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . p. 244

³⁴ Manoel de Almeida, *The History of High Ethiopia or Abyssinia* . . . , p. 100

³⁵ The royal prison of Amba Gishen was an institution devised to keep royal sons in order to prevent court intrigues and problems of succession

where the kings' sons were secured and is, therefore, the native country of kings and of all the nobility."³⁶

The renowned social theorist, Donald Levine, referred to Bete Amhara as "the political and cultural center for Greater Ethiopia." He further remarked that until the Muslim invasion of the 1530s, Bete Amhara was the nucleus of the Abyssinian kingdom, a region where the Royal palace and residence was located.³⁷

Two reasons can be traced to the selection of Bete Amhara as a center. The first one is the stability of the area. At that time it was relatively a peaceful area when compared with other regions of Ethiopia where continuous wars were waged for submission or to take the central power.³⁸ Secondly, the vast wealth of the region. Bete Amhara was a spacious region of flat arable land with many resources, standing crops, rivers and copious rain. Due to the growth of agricultural production and trade the region is said to become prosperous. Especially during Lebne Dingel's reign it was a time marked by economic and cultural prosperity.³⁹

As mentioned above, Bete Amhara was a region with Amharic speaking Christians. Due to the presence of many Christians, numerous churches were built in the area. Francisco Alvarez, who saw the region in the 1520s, had expressed the presence of churches in Bete Amhara by saying that "there is no a span of land where there are not churches".⁴⁰

³⁶ Job Ludolphus, "the new History of Ethiopia", London, St Paul Churches Yard, 1684, p. 13

³⁷ Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia* . . . , p.72

³⁸ Tesfaye Mekonen, *The Role of Religion in the History of South Wollo* . . . , p. 18

³⁹ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , pp. 219-222

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 257

Many of the churches were built by the Emperors. As Arab Faqih revealed every king who ruled Abyssinia built churches in Bete Amhara and when he died he was carried there to be buried in a tomb inside the church.⁴¹ Generally, constructing churches was a common practice among Ethiopian monarchs. Almost all of them constructed churches in different parts of the country.⁴²

During the 1520s Alvarez stated that in the region of Bete Amhara Emperors had a great foundation of churches for their tombs, and endowed each one with large revenues. Subsequently, many of the rulers were buried in the churches they had built. For instance, Emperor Ba'de Maryam was buried in the church of Atronsa-Maryam; he had built in Bete Amhara. Naod's remains were also taken to Mekane-Sellassie in the early 1520s.⁴³

Among these royal churches built in Bete Amhara were Mekane- Sellassie, Atronsa-Maryam, Gishen Maryam, Debre Egziabher, Debre Estifanos, Genete Giorgis, Debre Negodguwad, Mekane Semayat and many others. Here I would like to give a short description on one of these royal churches which had been constructed in Bete Amhara, Mekane-Sellassie.

The church of Mekane-Sellassie, which literally means 'Place of the Trinity', was a very large and fine church built near the palace of Libne Dingel near Wore-Illu. The construction of the church had begun by Emperor Naod (r. 1494-1508) and completed by his son Emperor Libne Dingel (r. 1508-1540)⁴⁴ Mekane-Sellassie was believed to be the largest and most decorative church not only in the region, also in the country. Informants mentioned that in terms of its size, adornment, number of staff and services delivered, it might have been the largest Cathedral of

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 222

⁴² For instance, most of the churches in Addis Ababa are constructed by Emperors Menelik and Hailesselassie.

⁴³ Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*. . . , p. 256-257

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 256

the African continent. Contemporary written accounts confirm with this indication. Regarding this matter, the writer of Futuh Al Habesha narrates:

There was a church in Amhara that had no peer in Abyssinia. King Naod, the father of King Libne Dingel had built it. He exhausted himself in its construction, in its planning in every detail of the work. He adored it with Gold and spent thirteen years in its construction. He never saw the work completed, because he died after thirteen years. His son Wonag Seged became heavily involved in it and took over its construction after him. He took more pains over it than his father. It was entirely planted in Gold leaf⁴⁵; it blazed like a fire.⁴⁶

In addition to the writer's personal observations and account, one can further realize the greatness of the church from the admiration of Imam Ahmed who demolished it just thirteen years after its completion.⁴⁷ When Imam Ahmed and his men saw the church, they were astonished by the workmanship. Arab Faqih explains that "when the Imam saw it, he was almost blinded by its dazzling brilliance." As the Imam was astonished by the church, he asked the Arab soldiers who were with him "Is there the like of this church with its image and its gold, in Byzantine, or India, or in any other place?" They replied, "we never saw or heard of its like in

⁴⁵ Gold leaf in Ethiopia was highly regarded and skillfully worked. It is reported that Emperor Libne Dingel wrote a letter to King Manoel I of Portugal asking the supply of craftsmen who could make the Gold leaf. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*. . . ., p. 501

⁴⁶ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . ., p. 220

⁴⁷ It was unfortunate that this huge and decorative church does not exist long. It was destroyed by Imam Ahmed. Details on the destruction of these and other churches will be given in the next topic

Byzantine, or India or anywhere in the world.”⁴⁸ Thus, I argue that Mekane-Sellassie could be the biggest cathedral of medieval Ethiopia.

The construction work is said to have been given greater attention by Emperors Naod and Lebne-Dingel. They adorned the church with gold and other precious ornaments. According to Arab Faqih, the church was embellished with gold and silver plates, covered with pearls. The door panels were made of wood and ten cubits⁴⁹ long and four cubits wide. They had covered the top of it with embellishments of gold and silver, and above the gold, there were precious stones of many colours. The interior was decorated with figures of different kinds.⁵⁰

Regarding its size, the church was one hundred cubits (approximately 50 m) long and one hundred cubits wide. Its height was one hundred and fifty cubits⁵¹. Thus, in modern measurement, the surface area of the church was approximately 2500 meter square. Tekele-Tsadik Mekuria suggested that Mekane-Sellassie might outshine its peers in Europe such as St. Sofia in terms of its size, architectural design and also in its gold and silver plate.⁵²

After twenty five years of construction, the church was consecrated on 12 January 1521 in the presence of the Emperor Libne Dingel, the queens Elleni and Naod Mogasa, Bishop Abuna Marqos and the clergy of the other royal churches. Alvares’ admiration lead to him stating that “there is no adequate description to us of the architecture of this church.” He described the interior of the church as it was built of stone topped by a wooden roof, with a principal door

⁴⁸ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 246

⁴⁹ Cubit is an ancient unit based on the forearm length from the tip of the middle finger to the bottom of the elbow. The length of a cubit was based on the distance from the elbow to the fingertips, so it varied from person to person, i.e 47.5 to 53.3 centimeter. The average length of a cubit is believed to be equal to fifty centimeters.

⁵⁰ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 246

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya. *Ye Gagn Ahmed Worera*,. . . p. 389

decorated with metal plates inlaid with stones, and above it two figures of our Lady St. Mary and angelic icons.⁵³

It is reported that the church had about four hundred and fifty priests in its service.⁵⁴ The large number of staff who served in the church aids our understanding just how large it was.



Figure 3 Part of the ruin of the church of Mekane-Sellassie [Photograph taken by the researcher 24/02/2017]

The construction of Mekane-Sellassie and other royal churches in Bete-Amhara shows that the region had long been a center of Christian activities which went hand in hand with the imperial administration.

⁵³ Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*. . . , p. 38

⁵⁴ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya. *Ye Gagn Ahmed Worera*, . . . p. 388; Informant: Ato Abate Assefa (interviewed at Mekane Sellassie in Wore-Illu on 23/02/2017). Hereafter, the date/s of the interview is to be indicated in the list of informants at the back of this thesis.

2.2.2 Major Socio-Political and Religious backdrops

2.2.2.1 Christianity in Wollo

Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia in the fourth century. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (called Tewahdo in Ethiopia) is one of the oldest organized Christian bodies in the world. Indeed, there are sources that indicate the preaching of Christianity in Ethiopia before it became the state religion in the fourth century.⁵⁵ It was in 332 that Christianity became official religion⁵⁶ of the Axumite kingdom following the conversion of its king, Ezana to Christianity. He was baptized and renamed Abraha. Inscriptions, documentary sources, and coins minted during his reign bearing the symbol of a cross attest to the religious conversion of Ezana.⁵⁷

The first half of the sixth century is said to have been a period during which the Axumite kingdom reached its peak during the reign of Kaleb. His reign was marked by major progress in the spread of Christianity. He is also known for military expeditions towards South Arabia, present-day Yemen. According to Paul Henze, it was the Christian enthusiasm along with political and economic factors that motivated Kaleb's expedition to Yemen against the Jewish Himyarite ruler who was persecuting Christians there.⁵⁸ It is reported that in the late sixth and

⁵⁵ Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and medieval Ethiopian history to 1270*. United Printers, 1972, p. 22

⁵⁶ From the very beginning of its introduction, Christianity was the official religion of the country. State and church had been united firmly. The church has long enjoyed a dominant role in the culture and politics of Ethiopia, having served as the official religion of the ruling elite until the demise of the monarchy in 1974.

⁵⁷ Christopher Haas, "Mountain Constantines: The Christianization of Aksum and Iberia", *Journal of Late Antiquity*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, p.122; Steven Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity: Kingship, Ethnicity, and Christianity in Orthodox Ethiopia", *Church History and Religious Culture* (CHRC) Vol. 89 No. 3, Leiden, 2009, p. 293 According to Kaplan, in his early years as ruler, Ezana is said to have dedicated his military victories to pagan divinities but later these formulas changed, with a Ge'ez text acknowledging '[t]he Lord of Heaven' and a Greek inscription commencing: '[i]n the faith of God and the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'

⁵⁸ Paul Henze, *Layers of Time . . .*, p.15

seventh centuries, Christianity expanded towards the southern part of Axumite Empire and even beyond its territorial limit. One of these areas was Wollo.⁵⁹ Before the introduction of Christianity in Wollo, there is an assumption that the people might have been partly pagans and partly followers of Judaism. According to Gedle Abba Iyasus Moa, before the construction of St. Stephen monastery on the island of Lake Haik, there was a python which the people worshiped and brought cows and milk for sacrifices.⁶⁰ This indicates that up to the expansion of Christianity and the construction of churches in the area, the region was under the influence of traditional religion.

In contrast, oral and written sources signpost the presence of a Jewish community in Amhara Sayint before the introduction of Christianity. According to these sources, a Jewish community who relocated from Israel settled around Amhara Sayint from 4500 BC to 35 BC. A church called Tedbabe Maryam was initially built for the temple of a Jewish worship.⁶¹ There are still places in and around Sayint which are named after places in Israel. Among those names are Gallia, Bitania, Koreb, Kibran, and Tabor all which indicate the existence of Jewish community in the area.

During the reign of Kaleb (r. 520-540) large scale expansion of Christianity was made within the districts of Wag and Lasta, northern localities of Wollo. As a result, in the first quarter of the sixth century, the Axumite church had already been firmly established in the north-western part of Wollo. There are many churches in this area that are attributed to King Kaleb. Those include rock-hewn churches like Bilbala Giyorgis, Bilbala Kirkos, Arbatu Enssesa and Sarzina Mikael.⁶²

Both the fragmentary Arabic references to the Ethiopian region and the traditions of the

⁵⁹ Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. London: Frank Cass and Co, Ltd., 1965, p. 22

⁶⁰ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *Ye Gagn Ahmed Worera*, . . . , P.10

⁶¹ Tesfaye Mekonen, *The Role of Religion in the History of South Wollo* . . . , p.13

⁶² Natnael Ketema, *An archaeological study of rock churches in Lasta, Northern Wollo*. Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 2012, p. 27

Ethiopian church confirm that from about the first quarter of the ninth century, the Axumite kingdom established well beyond the highlands of Angot, into the central part of Wollo. As Tadesse mentioned, the expansion of the kingdom was undertaken as part of a definite program of Christian settlement and evangelization. He also added that the Axumite king, Dil Ne'ad, led one hundred and fifty priests from Axum to Amhara and assigned them to teach there.⁶³ Thus, such evangelical activities resulted in the significant spreading of the faith in some parts of Wollo.

By the tenth century, the kingdom of Axum was controlling a vast territory between the Dahlak Islands and Zeila on the coast, and from Ansaba-Barka Rivers in the north to the central Shewan plateau in the interior south. Consequently, Wollo was part of this extension and inevitably a portion of the evangelization program. When Christianity expanded into Bete Amhara, many churches had been built in and around the Lake Haik region. One of the churches founded in the region is the church of St. Stephen⁶⁴ which was established on the island of the lake. Among the local sources regarding the island church of St. Stephen, Gedle Abune Iyasus Moa, transmits the tradition that a church dedicated to St. Stephen had already been built in about 850 A. D by an Axumite king Dil-Ne'ad and an Egyptian bishop Abune Selama.⁶⁵ Del Ne'ad is said to have endowed the church with three hundred clergies from Axum.⁶⁶

In addition to the island church of St. Stephen oral and written sources recount the establishment of other churches in the surrounding areas during the last quarter of the ninth century. Among

⁶³ Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972. p. 37

⁶⁴ The monastery is dedicated to St. Stephen, who is considered to be a pioneer martyr of the New Testament period

⁶⁵ Gedle Iyasus Moa A hand written Manuscript at the Monastery of Haik St. Stephen. (Has no author, and date) pp. 18-19 in the study of medieval Ethiopian history, Gedles (Hagiographies) are considered as important historical documents.

⁶⁶ Jean Dorso, *Ancient Cities and Temples*, . . . , p. 91

these are Debre-Igziabher (which literally means a place of God), Hara Maryam, and a church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul on the western shore of the lake. The churches are said to have been among the oldest churches in Ethiopia. According to some accounts, it was in 627 AD that the monastery of Debre Egziabher was founded on the shores of the lake. Due to the presence of these churches, Lake Haik and the neighboring region is said to have been predominantly inhabited by Christian people for a long time.⁶⁷

As discussed above, Christianity was preached in the heartland of Wag and Lasta, northern Wollo, by Axumite rulers. By the time the Zagwe dynasty established its center in the area (Wag and Lasta), the church was an already established part of the region. After securing political power, the new Zagwe dynasty developed the revival and expansion of Christianity in the kingdom.⁶⁸ For many writers of Ethiopian church history, the coming to power of the Zagwe dynasty marked another turning point in the history of Christianity and the establishment of rock churches in the area. The period is considered as the reflection of the peak of rock hewing technology. Rock churches flourished in Lasta during this period. The cave church of Yimrehane Kiristos, the eleven rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and the rock-hewn church of Asheten Maryam are among the celebrated rock churches hewn during the period.⁶⁹

In this regard, King Lalibela, (r.1181-1221) is remembered as one of the greatest of the Zagwe kings. It was at this time that the most astonishing rock-hewn churches were carved. His aim was to create holy places within his own land. In the words of Dons Kritzinger, “Lalibela felt

⁶⁷ Aba Haile-Mikael, “A Brief History of Debre Haik St. Stephen and Abune Iyasus Moa Communal Monastery in South Wollo”, BA Thesis, Holy Trinity Theological College, Addis Ababa, 2005, p. 16

⁶⁸ Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, . . . , p. 55

⁶⁹ Natnael Ketema, *An archaeological study of rock churches in Lasta*, . . . , p. 32

called to build an African Zion.”⁷⁰ The construction of such rock-hewn churches added value to the development of Christianity and Christian culture in the region. The major episode that paved way for intensive Christianization of Bete Amhara is the founding of Haik’s St. Stephen church as a monastery and the arrival of the great church father, Abuna Iyesus Moa, to the area during the mid thirteen century. The presence of this church attracted many church fathers and disciples to the area. One such church father to arrive at the monastery of Haik, and contribute a lot to the growth of religious education and the expansion of Christianity was Abuna Iyasus Moa.⁷¹

At the time of Abuna Iyasus Moa’s arrival in Haik, the church was said to have been insufficiently supplied by priests and deacons. His advent to Lake Haik is regarded as a turning point in the history of monasticism and the story of evangelization. The settlement of Abune Iyasus Moa brought about the establishment of a monastic school. Following his arrival, Debre Haik became a center of education and pilgrimage. Abuna Iyasus Moa started his own school where many students from different places joined him. He thus, opened up new opportunities of learning for the Christians of Amhara and Shewa, and many appear to have taken advantage of

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present*, Eerdmans publishing, 1995, p. 47) Dons Kritzinger, “Christianity in northern Ethiopia: Missiological Observations following a visit”, *Southern African Journal of Mission Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 3 Nov 2009, p. 97

Due to the blockade of Jerusalem because of the Crusades, Ethiopian pilgrims were unable to travel to Jerusalem. It was because of this reason that Lalibela decided to build a new Jerusalem in his own land. In the process he left behind one of the best architectural wonders known as the rock hewn churches of Lalibela. According to the modern construction technology, a building has to be constructed from its base upwards to its roof. This logic is disproved at the hills of Lalibela in Ethiopia. Here the rock-hewn churches are constructed from the top down to the bottom. All the pillars, the slabs, the windows, the doors are built beginning from the roof downwards to the base of the building. The secret behind this wonderful building is still a mystery.

Being surprised by the art of the building and the carved decorations on it, the local people composed the following verse to express their admire:

እንዴት አድርጎ ሠራው. እንደምን አድርጎ አነፀው?
ለመጥረቢያው. እንኳን እጅታ የለው.

Which literally mean “How he (Lalibela) constructed these rock-hewn churches in the absence of modern construction tool?

⁷¹ Abba Iyesus-Mo'a, one of the saints of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, was the founder and the first abbot (head) of the famous monastery of St. Stephen of Lake Haik in Wollo, about 430 km North of Addis Ababa. Abba Iyyesus Mo'a is one of the most eminent personalities of Ethiopian monasticism and is said to have been the spiritual father of many disciples, who stayed with him on the island and who in return established other monasteries.

this. Many young men from among the local and further afield Christians joined the monastic school which he founded.⁷² For his teaching of thousands of students, Abuna Iyasus Moa is referred to as “ወላዴ አፅላፍ”, a Ge’ez term which literally mean ‘Instructor of Thousands’.

During forty-four year stay at Haik, Iyasus Moa collected several manuscripts from different monasteries and had them copied, thereby establishing the first modern Ethiopian church libraries. Similarly, he established the first great church schools there, where he then trained eight hundred disciples at the same time. Thus, from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries the monastery became the most famous school in the country. It emerged as a very important religious education and cultural center for the region and the country. The great apostles of Medieval Ethiopia, who expanded Christianity all over the country studied at this monastery. The lessons taught at the monastic school were religious and therefore, the main aim behind it was to train new recruits for the church service.⁷³

When the disciples graduated from Haik, they are believed to have left the school and establish their own monastic centres in different areas. They also carried out missionary activities among their communities and built churches. While some of them expand Christianity within Bete Amhara, others appeared to disperse into the provinces of the country. Among the disciples of Iyasus Moa were: Abba Tekle Haymanot of Debre Libanos, Abba Hirute Amlak of Lake Tana,

⁷² Aba Haile-Mikael, “A Brief History of Debre Haik St. Stephen, p. 24

⁷³ Ibid, p. 32; Informant: Aba Gebre-Sellassie Belay, Manager of South Wollo Dioces (of Ethiopian Orthodox Church)

The traditional school of Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the foundation of knowledge and wisdom. Before the introduction of modern education in the country in 1908, these schools were playing the overall role in spreading literacy to the people. People were thought the skills of reading and writing, arithmetic, art, architecture, law, governance, medication and other talents and skills in these traditional schools. These schools have been institutes of architectural, governance, leadership, philosophical, law and other developmental skills of the society. The schools are still playing immense roles in personality development, patriotism, heritage management and transmitting the currently available spiritual wealth of the generation to the next one. Generally, no part of life is untouched in this traditional education of Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

Abba Giyorgis of Gasicha, Abba Ze Iyyesus, Abba Betselote Michael, and Abba Aron of Zedebre Daret (of the Parish of Daret).⁷⁴

According to Tadesse, Batsalota Mikael made active the expansion of the church into Woleka, the western part of Wollo. He is also said to have started a serious of reforms in the monastic practices in Bete Amhara. The other disciple, Anorewos, is said to have founded the church of Debre-Gol and preached among the local people of Weleka (western Wollo). He is responsible for converting many of the people of Weleka into the worship.⁷⁵ Ruins of buildings and caves of these medieval churches in Wogdi and Kalla districts of South and western part of Wollo are living witnesses of this fact. This period, the thirteenth to sixteenth century, is regarded as the “Golden Age” of Ethiopian Church. It is because traditional schools flourished, the literature of the church had reached and Christianity expanded.⁷⁶

In addition to the establishment of Christian culture in Bete Amhara, a number of churches have been built in the region. Arab Faqih mentioned Bete Amahara as “a region where numerous sanctuaries had been built by the Ethiopians housing priceless treasures belonging to church and state”.⁷⁷ While many of the churches were destroyed during the Muslim attack, some of them are still in the province serving the community.

⁷⁴ Kassa Nigus, *The Short Biography of Abba Iyyesus Moa*, December, 2015 https://eotcmk.org/siten/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=224&Itemid=1

⁷⁵ Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, . . . , pp. 115 & 187

⁷⁶ Mezmur Tsegaye, “Traditional Education of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Its Potential for Tourism Development (1975-present)”, MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2011, p. 20

⁷⁷ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 219

One of these churches, Gishen Maryam, is among the top pilgrimage sites in Ethiopia. It is said to receive 350,000-500,000 pilgrims and/or religious tourists each year.⁷⁸ Before it was established as a church, during the medieval period Gihen Maryam was the main center of education for the royal families. Since it was a prison where the royal families were kept, many kings received their religious and administrative education there.⁷⁹

To conclude, in addition to having served as a political center, Bete Amhara was also a midpoint for Christianity, Christian culture and education. It was exposed to Christian influence much longer than other areas, and Christians clearly dominant since the thirteenth century. That is why the region had been referred to as Bete Amhara, a region of Amharic speaking Christians.

2.2.2.2 The expansion of Islam

The introduction of Islam in Ethiopia dates back to the days of the prophet Mohammed. Islam first entered Ethiopia and the Horn through two points on the Red Sea coast: the Dahlak Island and port of Zeila.⁸⁰ Historians asserted that the introduction of Islam to Ethiopia was associated with the arrival of the first Muslim refugees who were persecuted by the Quraish Arabs. According to Trimingham, when the prophet's followers were being persecuted in Mecca by the Quraish, he recommended his followers to seek refuge in Ethiopia saying "if you go to Abyssinia you will find a king under whom none are persecuted. It is a land of righteousness where God

⁷⁸ Ermias Kifle, "Religious tourism potential of Gishen Derbe Kerbe Mariam, Ethiopia'. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 3 No.1, 2014 , p.9 Mount Gishen was used as royal prison for about 176 years (1270-1446)

⁷⁹ Tesfaye Mekonen, *The Role of Religion in the History of South Wollo* . . . , p. 21

⁸⁰ G.B. Martin, "Mahadism, Clerics and Holy War 1300-1600". In *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, Michigan State University, (Harold G. Marcus Ed.), 1973,p. 91

will give you relief from what you are suffering.”⁸¹ The refugees were warmly received in Axum and could practice their faith liberally.

Outside the Arabian heartland where Islam emerged, the first converts to the new religion, are assumed to have been Ethiopians. Having this reality, the prominent historian and Emeritus Professor Haggai Erlich marked that where “Muslims and Christians first met and talked in Africa is in Ethiopia.” Since the first Hegira was towards Ethiopia, it was in the Horn of Africa that Islam and Christianity first met, and the legacy of that initial meeting continues to affect their relations even today.⁸² While Islamic contact with Ethiopia can be traced to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam is said to have actually exercised in the country around the eighth century when Islamic traders from the Dahlak Islands began moving into the Ethiopian hinterland.⁸³ By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many nomadic peoples of the Horn of Africa including the Afar, Somali and Beja of Ethiopia are believed to have embraced Islam.⁸⁴

In Ethiopia, Islam was introduced under two different circumstances; peacefully by winning the heart of new adherents, and by a war of conquest, the Jihad. In the first few centuries of its arrival, the expansion of Islam was peaceful and gradual. It expanded in a modest way along the coastal areas and lowlands of the interior which were inhabited by pastoralist nomads.⁸⁵ The main reason for its gradual expansion into Ethiopia was the presence of a Christian culture and

⁸¹ Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. . . , p. 44

⁸² Haggai Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn of Africa* . . . , p. 1

⁸³ Travis J. Owens, “Beleaguered Muslim Fortresses And Ethiopian Imperial Expansion From The 13th to the 16th Century”, MA Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, 2008, p.7

⁸⁴ Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Islamic World*, East Africa Publication, 2008, p. 41

⁸⁵ Jon Abbink, *An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of Identity and Politics*. Journal of African Cultural Studies, Vol. 11, No. 2 (December, 1998), Taylor & Francis, Ltd, p. 111

state, affecting the pace of its expansion in the central highlands.⁸⁶ It was in the first quarter of the sixteenth century that Islam expanded over a vast area in a short period of time with a war of invasion. This is discussed in further detail in later sections.

Among the Ethiopian regions where Islam had spread to a great extent is Wollo. The introduction of Islam into Wollo is assumed to be right from its emergence in Arabia. Oral sources in the area indicate that some Muslim migrants, who were chased by the Quraish and came to Ethiopia, settled around the district of Wore-Himano in Wollo. It seems because of this that rulers of the *Mammedoch* dynasty of Wollo claimed their descent from the Prophet Mohammed. Even Muslims who are currently living in Wore-Himeno still claim that they have a blood relation with the prophet.⁸⁷ Extra sources indicate that another group of Muslims came from Arabiya around 744 AD and settled in Qallu district of Wollo mixed with the native Argoba ethnic group.⁸⁸ Thus, it is likely that the long establishment of Islam in Wollo was likely since the eighth and ninth centuries.

The earliest period of the Islamization of Wollo falls between the foundation of the Sultanates of *Shawa* and the Sultanates of *Ifat* between the end of the 9th and 12th centuries. Hussein also reported the coming of Muslim clerics into Wollo from Tembien and their dissemination of the faith in the same period. He stated:

“Informants have also recounted other traditions of the Islamization of Wollo. ...

These traditions are about the ‘Asqari’ and ‘Ad Kabire’ clan in Tembein, claims to have originated from the Hijaz and to have been related to the Asqari. Its clerics later moved into Wollo and disseminated Islam. The ancestors of the clans

⁸⁶ Hussien, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wollo*, p. 43

⁸⁷ Informant Sheikh Hussien Ali

⁸⁸ Tesfaye Mekonen, *The Role of Religion in the History of South Wollo . . .*, p. 14

were two brothers, the eldest of whom was called Kabire while the youngest was Asqari. The off springs of Asqari settled in Borena western Wollo, where they were considered as possessors of Karama (Divine favour).”⁸⁹

According to Fekadu, some groups from Afar, in the eastern hinterland of Wollo had become Muslims by the fourteenth century.⁹⁰ This makes Wollo a region with one of the oldest and largest Muslim populations in the country. Though to a lesser scope, Muslim communities were already established in pre-Gragh Bete Amhara since the advent of the faith to Ethiopia. In 1520 Alvarez observed the presence of Muslim communities who were living in co-existence with Christians in Ambasel, or near the present-day town of Dessie. He found it to be “a very good town, and they hold a very great market there. Beyond one of the rivers, there is a large town of moors rich with much trade in slaves, silk and all other kinds of merchandise . . . Here is a great intercourse between the Christians and Moors (Muslims).”⁹¹

Despite the above mentioned early developments, Islam to a great extent only expanded into Wollo in the sixteenth century during the civil war between the Christian High land kingdom and the Muslim Sultanate of Adal that lasted from 1529 to 1543. During the first quarter of the sixteenth century, under the leadership of a skilled soldier and Islamic revivalist, Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi⁹² the new Sultanate of Adal launched a full-scale Jihad against the Ethiopian highland state.⁹³

⁸⁹ Hussien, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wollo*, p. 62

⁹⁰ Fekadu Begna, “Land and the Peasantry in Northern Wollo: 1941-74”. MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 1990, p. 16

⁹¹ Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*. . . ., p. 251

⁹² Nicknamed *Gragh* which literally means the left handed

⁹³ Valerie J. Hoffman, *The Islamic World*, East Africa Publication, 2008, p. 41

Different scholars put forward different ideas on the cause and aim of the conquest of Ahmed Gragn. For Abbink the aim of this war was to root out and destroy Christianity in the area and to end the Solomonic monarchy which had been reinstated in 1270.⁹⁴ Other writers asserted that the cause and aim of the conflict is political and economic than religious. For instance, Owens stated that “the root cause of these conflicts was not religion but the Ethiopian desire to wrest control of trade routes from their Islamic neighbours.” Tesema confirmed the main cause of the conflict between the Christian kingdom, and the Muslim Sultanate of Adal to be complex politico-economic issues. Hussien, who agrees with Owens and Tessema wrote that “from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, prolonged conflicts between the Christian kingdom and the Muslim principalities of southern and south-eastern Ethiopia, caused primarily by economic and political rather than purely religious factors, resulted in the relations between Christians and Muslims reaching their lowest ebb.”⁹⁵ I argue that although the conflict has socio-political aspects, it is far more the religious aspects than the socio-political issues. I forward the following reasons for the conquest to have more of a religious intention than a socio-political one.

Firstly, there is the blessing Imam Ahmed acquired from the Emir of Mecca. When Imam Ahmed started the conquest, the Emir of Mecca gave him his blessings, signified by the presentation of the green flags of Islamic holy war. This blessing is more religious than political or economic. Secondly, the Ottoman Turks provided cannons and firearms to the Adal Sultanate

His forces received essential help from Arab Mercenaries and Turks who had been encroaching on the Red Sea coast up to the city of Massawa. They supplied fire arms, cannons and match-lock men from their army. The Christian sate also supported by the Portuguese in the ending stages of the war. Trimmingham elucidates that this was the reflection of the struggle between Portugal and Ottoman Turks for the mastery of the Red Sea.

⁹⁴ Abbink, *An Historical-Anthropological Approach to Islam in Ethiopia*, p. 114

⁹⁵ Travis J. Owens, *Beleaguered Muslim Fortresses . . .*, p. 7; Hussein Ahmed, *Coexistence and/or Confrontation?: Towards a Reappraisal of Christian-Muslim Encounter in Contemporary Ethiopia*, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 36, Fasc. 1 (2006), p. 4

to use in the conquest. This provision was acquired due to religious similarities.⁹⁶ The third factor I forward is the destruction during the course of the war. The major targets of the conquest were churches, monasteries, priests, and Christians as a whole. This has given the conflict a religious character. Fourthly, the invasion was targeted at the forceful conversion of Christians, and the expansion of Islam. From this we can that the invasion was based on religious intent, even though it brought about major socio-political changes in Wollo specifically, and Ethiopia generally.

Davis, who labelled the conflict as a sixteenth century Jihad in Ethiopia, associated the Nigerian Usman Dan Fodio's movement with the Ethiopian Imam Ahmed Gragh conquest. Three hundred years before the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio issued his manifesto initiating the Jihad which brought on great social and political changes in Northern Nigeria, Imam Ahmed also sparked off one of the most decisive military campaigns which brought about change in North East Ethiopia, especially in Wollo.⁹⁷

Like other parts of central and northern Ethiopia, Bete Amhara and its environs were subjected to several campaigns launched by the forces of Imam Ahmed in the early 1530s. During the course of the civil war, many Christians were massacred, and a number of old churches and monasteries in Bete Amhara had been plundered and demolished. Arab Fakih, the chronicler of Imam Ahmed and an eyewitness of the conquest, recounts the destruction of the major churches in Bete Amhara. According to him, the Imam sent his war generals against all the churches, except for Mekane-Sellassie to which the Imam himself went.

⁹⁶ Travis J. Owens, *Beleaguered Muslim Fortresses . . .*, p. 32

⁹⁷ Asa J. Davis, "The Sixteenth Century Jihād In Ethiopia And The Impact On Its Culture" (PartOne) *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1963), p. 579

⁹⁸ He also sent Wazir Nur bin Ibrahim, Said Mohammed, and Basera Bin Jusa against the royal churches of Bete Amhara: Atonse-Maryam, Debre-Negodguwad and Bete-Semayat respectively, to loot and demolish them.

When narrating the looting and destruction of the churches of Mekane-Sellassie and Atronsa Maryam,⁹⁹ Arab Faqih inscribed:

The Imam said, ‘whatever anyone takes shall be his apart from the plates.’ So, they set to work with a thousand axes, ripping out the gold and the precious stones which were in the church, from the time of the afternoon prayer, until the time of the evening prayer. Each took as much gold as he could carry. They enriched themselves with so much booty that they would never more be in want. More than a third of its gold was burnt in the church. The Emir Nur in the meantime had arrived at the church of Atronsa-Maryam, entered it, and was astounded as its workmanship. But as for gold, they found none in it. The idol worshipers who looked after it had taken the gold that was in it away. The Emir found four monks. He asked them ‘where is the church’s treasure?’ They answered, ‘we won’t show you, even if we die for the religion of Maryam.’ So, the Muslims killed them.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p.246

⁹⁹ Atronsa-Maryam literally means the Throne of St. Mary

¹⁰⁰ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 248

When the Muslim army which reached Atronsa-Maryam found nothing, they massacred the four monks who were guarding the church. It is reported that similar killings of priests and monks happened at many of the churches of Bete Amhara.¹⁰¹

The chronicler of Lenbe Dingel provides us with the list of churches which were destroyed by Imam Ahmed. Among these are the royal churches of Bete Semayat, Debre Negodguwad, Genete Giorgis, and Ganate Maryam. In relation to the looting, Arab Faqih enlightened the following:

When the army of the Imam arrived at these churches, entered it and discover vast treasure. They took away its treasure, including the golden calf as tall as a man's height. They also found a number of tabots,¹⁰² which were made of gold. They took away the treasure and gold . . . The Wazir said to them, 'Now that you have satisfied your appetite for booty, you have no camels to carry it for you: so you carry it on your shoulder, and on your mules. The house is still full of treasure and of silk, but we are not going to leave this immense quantity of silk for the idol worshipers. We will burn it'. Then he said, 'burn the house', and they burnt it along with its silk brocades. And the church burnt to a cinder. The Imam received his share of the gold and the silk brocade.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Jean Dorsse, *Ancient Cities and Temples*, . . ., p. 145

¹⁰² Tabot is a word referring to a replica of the Tablets of Law, onto which the Biblical Ten Commandments were inscribed, used in the practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Tabot can also refer to a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. A Tabot is a consecrated wooden altar slab, made of wood or marble and covered with gold, which symbolizes the Ark of the Covenant (containing the Ten Commandments) and represents the presence of God in every Ethiopian church. It is the Tabot rather than the church building which is consecrated.

¹⁰³ Paul Lester Stenhouse, *The Conquest of Abyssinia* . . ., p. 249

The duration of the war is characterized by looting and destruction; treasures were taken, churches demolished, and priests and Christians massacred. A great number of centres of Ethiopian Christian civilization was destroyed. When Arab Faqih writes about the amount of gold looted, he said, that “the amount of gold could not be calculated.”¹⁰⁴

Beyond the material destruction and life cost, the major impact of the war was the expansion of Islam in the areas where the Imam conquered. Both Muslim and Christian sources agree that large scale conversion of the population of the highlands did take place. The Ethiopian Chronicler who carefully preserved a yearly record of the reign of Emperor Gelawdewos (r. 1540-1559) affirmed that “many of the believers left the faith of the church and entered the faith of the Muslims. Hardly one out ten remained in their faith . . . almost all the Christian population of the highlands joined Islam under threat of the sword.”¹⁰⁵ One of those highland provinces was Wollo. Indeed, Islam has expanded over other northern and central provinces of Ethiopia, but it was in Wollo that it widely expanded. When we see the recent demographic structure of the different zones of the Amhara region, it is in Wollo, particularly the southern and eastern parts with the highest number of Muslims.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Asa J. Davis, *The Sixteenth Century Jihād in Ethiopia* . . . , p. 579

Zone	Total Population	Orthodox Christian	Protestan t	Catholi c	Muslim	Traditio nal	Others
South Wollo	2,518,862	725,390	5,494	937	1,785,568	1,107	366
North Wollo	1,500,303	1,241,363	1,232	1,229	256,242	168	69
North Gonder	2,929,628	2,794,231	3,085	290	125,648	186	6,188
South Gonder	2,051,738	1,972,513	2,069	1,045	75,462	51	598
North Shewa	1,837,490	1,740,338	6,507	194	90,176	107	168
East Gojjam	2,153,937	2,098,362	1,668	151	53,541	106	109
West Gojjam	2,106,596	2,078,683	2,631	148	25,044	28	62
Wag Himra	426,213	424,584	159	11	1,445	5	9
Awi Zone	982,942	927,865	1,847	28	44,205	3,727	5,270
Oromia zone (In Amhara Region)	457,278	10,977	1,974	155	443,874	142	156

Table 1: Central Statistics Agency, Census 2007 Tables: Amhara Region, Table 3.3, Population by Religion

As can be seen in Table 1, in the Amhara region the highest number of Muslims is recorded in South Wollo zone and Oromia zone, the former Qallu district. Those two zones comprise the medieval province of Bete Amhara.

Sources indicate that during his campaign, Imam Ahmed had with him preachers of Islam. He is said to have left a number of preachers in various parts of the region to propagate Islam among the indigenous population. Two of the early propagators of Islamic education were Sheikh Sabir and Sheikh Garad who lived near Kombolcha and Dessie, respectively. These scholars were credited for converting the surrounding Amhara communities. The villages of Sheshabir in Kombolcha and Garado (near Dessie) are believed to have been named after them.¹⁰⁶ It is recounted that during the nineteenth century, except for the districts of Sayint and Wadla-Delanta, that other parts of highland and lowland Wollo were dominated by Muslims.

Later, Wollo became the center of Islamic education and culture. Various Islamic schools were opened in different parts of the province. The most influential Islamic schools in Wollo were Geta, Jema Negus, Turu-Sina, Aman Amba, Dana, and Dabat. Most of these Islamic school centres were assumed to be established during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prominent Sheikhs such as Talaha Ja'far, Mufti Dawd, Muhammad Shafi, Hajji Said Bushira, and Ahmad Yassin, were a few of the renowned scholars that contributed to the establishment of Islamic education in the region.¹⁰⁷ Despite its influence in Wollo, the expansion of Islam later resulted in the development of common understandings and cultural practices which led to peaceful co-existence among the different religious and ethnic groups of the province.

¹⁰⁶ Hussien Ahmed, Harar-Wollo Relations Revisited: *Historical, Religious and Cultural Dimensions*. African Study Monographs, Suppl.41: 2010, p. 111; Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw

¹⁰⁷ Hussien, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wollo*, . . . , p. 82; Informants: Sheikh Abdu Mohammed and Ato Kedir Ali

However, the devastation due to the conflicts between the Sultanate of Adal and the Christian Highland Kingdom is said to have weakened both sides and gave freeway to the Oromo people to expand over the Ethiopian Highlands including Wollo. In relation to this Edmond Keller wrote that “even as the Christian Abyssinians and the Muslim Somalis were engaged in a protracted struggle for hegemony in the Horn of Africa, the Oromos were making inroads into the territories of both protagonists. At the height of their expansion, the Oromo occupied as much as one-third of the Abyssinian heartland.”¹⁰⁸

2.2.2.3 The Oromo Population Movement

The sixteenth century seems to have been a century of migration and population movement in different parts of Africa. In East Africa, the Oromo and Somali ethnic groups had large scale expansion. While the Somali moved within the Horn, the Oromo moved northwards to the highlands of Ethiopia. Bantu speaking groups are also said to have made northward expansions towards the Horn of Africa in the same period.¹⁰⁹

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Oromo penetrated much of the southern and northern highlands as well as towards the eastern lowlands of Ethiopia. The Oromo who

¹⁰⁸ Edmond Keler, “Making and Remaking State and Nation in Ethiopia”, In: *Borders, Nationalism and the African State*, Ricardo Rene Laremont (Ed), Boulder. Co: Lynne Reinner, 2005, p. 89

¹⁰⁹ E. R. Turton Bantu, “Galla and Somali Migrations in the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment of the Juba/Tana Area”. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1975), p. 520; Hiroki Ishikawa, “Northern Ethiopian Historiography during the Second Half of the Solomonic Period (1540-17 69)”, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, *Nilo-Ethiopian Studies* 16: 1-12 (2011), p. 1

penetrated and settled in the northern, north-eastern and south-eastern Bete Amhara from the last quarter of the sixteenth century were the Baraytuma, one of the two major confederacies of the Oromo.¹¹⁰ By the end of the sixteenth century, various Oromo clans had occupied the territory of Bete Amhara, the core province of the medieval Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. Among the prominent Oromo groups those who settled in different parts of present-day Wollo were the Wollo, Tulama, Wuhchale, Abono, Yeju, and Rayya.¹¹¹ According to Wemlinger, the Oromo incursion was more of a move to occupy land.¹¹²

In the course of their expansion, the Oromos were able to easily adapt to new communities using different mechanisms including their own process of adoption, *Moggaassa*.¹¹³ According to Levine, the Oromo became influential in the region in two ways; “by setting up independent political enclaves and by joining the mainstream of the Amhara life and court politics”.¹¹⁴ The Oromo occupied a large part of Wollo. They become the dominant inhabitants of the present-day districts of Borena, Wore-Illu, Wore-Himeno, Qallu, and Ambasel. They also ascended the escarpment from the valley of the Awash and penetrated the highlands of northern part of Wollo,

¹¹⁰ The Oromo people had differentiated into two major confederations of pastoral tribes: the Borana and the Barentu. There were also several other minor subgroups. The Barentu group thereafter expanded to the eastern regions now called Hararghe, Arsi, Wollo and northeastern Shawa. The Borana group expanded in the other directions, regions now called western Shawa, Welega, Illubabor, Kaffa, Gamu Goffa, and Sidamo. Asafa Jalata, “Oromo Peoplehood: Historical and Cultural Overview”, *Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange*, University of Tennessee Press, 2010, p. 5, 11-12

¹¹¹ Zergaw Asfera, *Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo . . .*, p. 3

¹¹² Cherri Reni Wemlinger “Identity in Ethiopia: The Oromo From The 16th to The 19th Century”, MA Thesis: Washington State University, 2008, p. 80

¹¹³ By the time the Oromo population had expanded over large areas of the empire, they had developed a number of mechanisms for establishing relationships with non -Oromo communities. One of these which seem to have facilitated the process of the expansion and a steady increase in the number of the population was the process of adaptation called *Moggaassa*. The adopted community or individual shares everything equally with the Oromo and becomes an Oromo. *Moggaassa* culture allowed other peoples to mix freely with the Oromo and live together in peace. Therefore, in the process of their expansion, the Oromo were able to adopt much of the population.

¹¹⁴ Levine, Greater Ethiopia, . . ., p. 82

Yejju and Raya. In the east, they domiciled in the lowland regions of Argoba and Afar. By 1581, they controlled almost the entire present-day Wollo province.¹¹⁵

The expansion and settlement of the Oromo in Bete Amhara/Wollo resulted in the dislodging of the indigenous Amhara people. The Amhara were pushed into the highland provinces of Sayint and Wadla-Delanta bordering Gojjam and Begemder to the west and northwest respectively. Whereas, part of them remained clustered in parts of highland Wollo, in particular Wore-Himeno and Ambasel became interspersed with new settlers. The Afar continued to inhabit the lowland province of Awusa and intermixed with the Oromo in Ambasel and Qallu.¹¹⁶

In relation to the displacement of the Amhara, Habtamu wrote that

the Oromo transformed the medieval Amhara into their homeland through conquest and by displacing the indigenous people. As the area of Oromo settlement expanded northwards into Amhara, the former inhabitants had been killed, exiled, or absorbed into the Oromo population by the eighteenth century. Many refugees retreated into the mountainous districts of Wadla-Delanta and Sayent. These areas preserved in a certain measure their old institutions and the Christian religion after the Oromo conquest. The eastern half of the province was thoroughly Islamized. Christianity virtually disappeared in much of what had once constituted Amhara.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Asnake Ali, A Historical Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Wollo 1872-1917. In: Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1988, p. 263 Fekadu Begna, *Land and the Peasantry in Northern Wollo*, p. 11

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 12

¹¹⁷ Habtamu Mengistie, "Land Tenure and Agrarian Social Structure in Ethiopia, 1636-1900". PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011, p. 235-238

The historian Hussein Ahmed also surmised that during the process of the Oromo settlement into Amhara there must have been extensive alienation of land belonging to the previous inhabitants by the different ruling families.¹¹⁸

These areas of Wollo in which the Oromo initially settled are known as *sebat bet Wollo* (the Seven Houses of Wollo). Their listing varies according to traditions. Huntingford listed the following areas as the Seven Houses of Wollo: Worra Himano, Worra Kallo, Lagga Ghora, Tehooladere, Boranna, Laggambo, and Lagga-Hidda. Whereas informants renounce that the Seven Houses of Wollo was composed of Ali Bet, Abay Bet, Chirecha, Lege Hida, Lege Gora, Lega Ambo and Ware Himano.¹¹⁹ This framework has been used until today to name the major administrative divisions of the province. Combes and Tamisier who passed through Wollo in 1835-37 indicate that the area inhabited by the Wollo Oromos extended from the Wahit River in the south; to the Bashilo River in the north-east and to Borena in the west.¹²⁰

After controlling the region, the new settlers renamed the different districts of Bete Amahara after the name of their clans and sub clans. According to oral tradition, the Oromo migration to this area was spearheaded by a clan leader known as Wollo. He was one of the six Karrayu who himself was a son Bareytuma. It is after the name of the largest Oromo group who settled there that the area came to be called Wollo.¹²¹ Following their settlement, most of the places in the region were given new Oromo names. Place names in the present-day Wollo such as Qallu, Bati,

¹¹⁸ Hussein, *Islam in Nineteenth-Century Wollo*, p.23

¹¹⁹ G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia The Kingdom of Kefa and Janjero*. London: International African Institute, 1995, p. 14; Informants Ato Kedir Hussie, and Woizero Berhane Zerihun.

¹²⁰ Combes et Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*. Paris: Louis Desessart, 1838, p. 285

¹²¹ Fekadu Begna, *A Tentative History of Wollo*, . . . , p. 2; Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo: 1872-1916*, MA Thesis (Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1983E.C), p.1; Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, (Addis Ababa, United Printers, 1996), p.32.

The term Wollo is said to have been derived from the name of their reputed forefather.

Wuchale, Worra Himano, Lagga Ghora, Tehuladere, Boranna, Laggambo, Lagga-Hidda. Whereas, informants renounce that the Seven Houses of Wollo are Oromo names given by the new settlers.

The massive Oromo migrations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries introduced a new ethnic element into the population of northern Ethiopia, including Bete Amhara. The occupation of the province by the Muslim army in the sixteenth century and conquest of the Oromo clans had severely weakened Christian communities there. These events transformed the Socio-economic and political identity of Bete Amhara. In the section below, I briefly discuss the demographic and cultural change in the province due to the expansion of Islam and the Oromo settlement.



2.2.2.4 Demographic and Cultural Changes in the province

“Wollo is an Amhara, Oromo, Muslim, and Christian altogether . . . While Ethiopia is diversity in diversity, Wollo is diversity in Unity.” Brian J. Yates

In previous sections I discussed the two major events of sixteenth century Ethiopia; the expansion of Islam and the Oromo population movement. Those events not only affect the political atmosphere of the country, but also completely transformed the socio-political landscape of Wollo province to a greater extent. They brought changes to the political geography of the Christian highland kingdom. The events had ended the political centrality of Shawa and Bete Amhara. After the sixteenth century Jihad, the Christian highland kingdom shifted its center to the north-western part of the country and its political geography had been restricted only to the

north of the Abbay River. Above all, the geographical boundary of Bete Amhara had been so greatly contracted that the province disappeared from the medieval map of Abyssinia.¹²²

According to Davis the sixteenth century Jihad that occurred in Ethiopia was responsible for the greatest cultural transformation in the history of Ethiopia.¹²³ Among other central and northern provinces of Ethiopia, it was Wollo that was highly affected by the expansion of Islam. After Ahmed Gragn, particularly, Wollo became a predominantly Muslim area more so than any of the other central and northern provinces of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the Christian population remained as the substratum of the area.¹²⁴

As Vilhanova mentioned, in Africa, Islamization was mostly followed by a cultural change in the places where the religion is extended.

In the African context, Islamisation refers to both the religious change and the accompanying cultural change, allowing, once the core requirements of the faith were fulfilled, for numerous local interpretations of Islam. The introduction of Islam meant many changes involving religious belief and concomitant changes in the material sphere, economy, society and politics.¹²⁵

Consequently, Islamic expansion in Wollo brought about socio cultural changes in the province. A region which once was center of Christianity and Christian culture became the center of Islam and Islamic education. The actions of Imam Ahmed was one of the most important contributing factors in shaping the demographic and cultural aspects of Wollo.

¹²² Derb Tefera Tasew, "The Nexus between Water Supply Infrastructure and Socio-economic Developments in Amhara Region, Ethiopia: 1941-2005". PhD Thesis, University of South Africa, 2017, p. 56

¹²³ Asa J. Davis, *The Sixteenth Century Jihad*, . . . , p567

¹²⁴ Fekadu Begna, *A Tentative History of Wollo*, . . . , p. 1

¹²⁵ Viera Pawlikova-Vilhanova, "Rethinking the Spread of Islam in Eastern and Southern Africa", *Asian and African Studies*, Vol 19, 2010, p. 136

The expansion and settlement of the Oromo people in the province had an impact equal to the expansion of Islam on shaping the socio-political and cultural set of the province. There is a relationship between population movements and cultural renovation.

Migration changes people, and it changes places. A change in location often brings with it a change in personal identity, with potentially major implications for politics in the receiving place. When migrants who have moved either short or long distances differ from residents in the receiving community, their arrival, especially in large numbers, brings change to that community, whether it is a neighbourhood or a nation.¹²⁶

Likewise, Oromo settlement transformed medieval Bete Amhara into their homeland. The Oromo, who occupied the land, brought different cultural and ritual practices which resulted in cultural and demographic changes in the province.

In the course of their expansion, the Oromos had developed several mechanisms to master places and impose their influence in their newly controlled areas. One of the mechanisms which seems to have facilitated the process of expansion and created a steady increase in the population was the process of adaptation called *Moggaassa*.¹²⁷ *Moggaassa* allowed non-Oromos to mix with the Oromo. Hence, it is said to have facilitated the interaction between the indigenous people and the migrant Oromos.

If a *Galla* likes a stranger, he makes him his *Moggassa*, or favourite, declaring before the Aba Geda, the governor of a small district, that he has made him his friend, and

¹²⁶ National Research Council, *Understanding the Changing Planet: Strategic Directions for the Geographical Sciences*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. (2010) <https://doi.org/10.17226/12860>

¹²⁷ Teshome Amenu, "The Rise and Expansion of Islam in Bale of Ethiopia: Socio-cultural and political factors and inter-religious relations", MA Thesis, (Bergen University, Department of Philosophy 2008), p.29

that no man should touch him. This ceremony is performed before the whole people, and sacrifices are offered. If anyone should kill or offend the *Moggassa*, he is obliged to pay one hundred oxen, which is the price paid by a murderer. If you have become the *Moggassa* of a *Galla*, you can go through the whole tribe; but if you have not, the *Gallas* would kill you immediately.¹²⁸

The adopted community or individual shares everything equally with the Oromo and becomes an Oromo. *Moggaassa* allowed other peoples to mix freely with the Oromo and live together in peace. In this regard, Baxter associated the Oromo people with the Khoisan people of South Africa who share several common features of territorial organization, gender, relations, kinship, ritual and cosmology with other peoples of the country.¹²⁹

In the previous section I mentioned that once the Oromo occupied the area, the new settlers changed the names of the different districts of Bete Amhara by conferring onto them the names of their clans. This by itself brought about alteration on the former identity of the province. According to Ndletyana, place names are “containers of memory”, a memory of identity and culture of a given society. Place-names have a special property of being part of a given cultural heritage in the sense that they tell us something about the locality of which they are named after.¹³⁰ The former names informed the identity of the province as it was before the Oromo; the name changes reflected the province’s new identity.

¹²⁸ Isenberg, C.W and Krapf, J. L., *Journals of the Rev. Messrs. . .*, p. 256

¹²⁹ P.T.W. Baxter and et al (Ed), *Being and Becoming an Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries*. Re Sea Press, 1996, p. 22

¹³⁰ Mcebisi Ndletyana, “Changing place names in post-apartheid South Africa: accounting for the unevenness. Social Dynamics”, *A Journal of African studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, March 2012, p. 91

As Uluocha suggests, in addition to identifying and distinguishing localities one from the other, place names have sentimental, literary, religious and cultural significance. A place-name imparts a certain character on a place.¹³¹ The new names given to the different districts of Wollo, identify Wollo as part of Oromo identity and character. Thus, the renaming of its places with new names aided in Bete Amhara losing its indigenous memory and identity that reflected its Christian and Amhara past. A clear socio cultural change in the province, which highlighted the history of the region.

In this regard, we can see a similar case in South Africa where many of its place names changed following the arrival of European explorers and settlers. According to Uluocha, post-apartheid South Africa inherited Eurocentric toponymy, which, in many cases, replaced indigenous place names.¹³²

Despite transforming the socio-political and cultural landscape of the provinces, the aforementioned great events of sixteenth century made Wollo a multi-ethnic and multi-religious province more so than any other northern and central province of Ethiopia.¹³³ The presence of different ethnic and religious groups made Wollo a cultural melting point where the process of constant intermingling and fusion of heterogeneous elements had been going for quite a long time. As a result of this, Wollo became a province where Muslims and Christians, and different ethnic groups lived together peacefully. The religious demography of the province, which as can be seen in Table 1, has an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians living together.

¹³¹ Nna O. Uluocha, "Decolonizing place-names: Strategic imperative for preserving indigenous cartography in post-colonial Africa". *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. 7 No.9, 2015, p. 181

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Brian J. Yates, *Invisible Actors: The Oromo And The Creation Of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1913)*, PhD Dissertation: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (2009), p. 61

Leading to the people of Wollo developing and sharing many customary, cultural and ritual practices.

In their interaction for centuries, the one imposed its own influence on the other and in return took some cultural elements from the other. To discuss in brief, Islam for instance, dominated Wollo which was absolutely a Christian and Amhara province. In return, it has been heavily influenced by various elements of Christianity and Oromo traditional belief.¹³⁴

Likewise, the settlement of the Oromo people in Wollo led to demographic and cultural changes in the province. They conveyed their religious and cultural beliefs to the newly settled regions especially Wollo.¹³⁵ In spite of imposing their influence in the newly settled areas, the Oromo absorbed the values, norms and religion of the indigenous people to a greater extent. From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the Oromo were in continuous interaction with their Amhara neighbours. According to Donald Crumey, by the mid eighteenth century, the Oromo settled in Wollo were rapidly assimilating themselves socially and linguistically to the Amhara norms.¹³⁶ As a result, they largely converted to Islam and adopted the local Amharic language.

In their study on the cultural integration between migrants and indigenous societies, Inglehart and Norris wrote that:

Theories of cultural integration suggest that immigrants gradually absorb the values and norms which predominate in their host society, especially on an inter-generational basis. By contrast, theories of divergence suggest that distinctive social values and norms are enduring and deep-rooted within each nation, shaped

¹³⁴ Hussien, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wollo*, p. 28

¹³⁵ Assefa Balcha, "Wadaja Ritual: Portrait of a Wollo Cultural Coping Mechanism". *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2017, p. 40

¹³⁶ Donald Crummey, "Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of Christian Ethiopia During the Zamana Masafent", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. 1975, p. 271

by collective histories, common languages, and religious traditions so that migrant populations are unlikely to abandon their cultural roots when they settle in another country.¹³⁷

Hence, the Oromo of Wollo abandoned their traditional belief system and adopted Islam as their religion; while also adopting Amharic as their language. The missionaries Isenberg and Krapf who passed through Wollo in the 1840s demonstrated that though the people of Wollo were referred to as *Galla*, most of the inhabitants spoke Amharic instead of Oromigna. A possible reason as to why the Oromo language is forgotten by the rising generation.¹³⁸ Asnake also added that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, none of the Wollo Oromo spoke the language. They had been Amharanized to the extent of forgetting their original language. However, those who inhabited the lowland districts of Qallu and Ambasel are Oromo, and they speak the language.¹³⁹

By the nineteenth century, the Oromo appear to have been dominated by Amhara and Muslim culture far more than they have influenced the later. Instead of the Amhara groups integrating into Oromo society, it was the Oromo that integrated into Amhara society, taking up almost exclusively Amhara cultural norms, aside from converting into Islam. Various English and French travellers who visited Ethiopia generally and Wollo, particularly in the nineteenth century witnessed this integration. Henry Salt was struck by the similarities in the language and cultural

¹³⁷ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Muslim integration into Western cultures: Between origins and destinations", *HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP09-007*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. 2009, p.3

¹³⁸ Isenberg, C.W and Krapf, J. L, p.346. Though their number is smaller, still there are few Oromos speaking the language in the Oromo special zone of Amhara region

¹³⁹ Asnake Ali, A Historical Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Wollo 1872-1917. In Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1988, p. 263

traits of the Muslim Oromo and Christian Amhara in Wollo.¹⁴⁰ Another traveller, Henry Blanc, found that “though retaining most of the characteristics of their race, they (the Wollo Oromo) adopted many of the customs the people they occupied. They lost in great measure their predatory and pastoral habits, tilled the soil, built permanent dwellings, and to a certain extent adopted in their dress, food, and mode of life the usages of former inhabitants.”¹⁴¹

Because of these interactions, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it was hardly possible to differentiate between Amhara and Oromo in the province of Wollo.¹⁴² Relating to this cultural interaction, in his work on Amhara Oromo relations in Wollo, Yates considered Wollo a “sponge” which takes in all the cultural practices of the areas. Like a sponge when it becomes saturated it overflows into areas around it, affecting cultural practices in the borderland areas.¹⁴³ The interaction and integration between the different ethnic and religious groups in Wollo led to the emergence of a unique genetic amalgam and cultural hybridity in the province. Studies have indicated that religious interactions have historically shaped cultures of a given community.¹⁴⁴ Hence, the Wolloye developed a rich variety of common customary and cultural practices which were not derived from scriptural tradition but instead reflect a variety of older cultural beliefs. Despite their dogmatic differences, both the Muslims and Christians of Wollo shared common cultural and ritual practices. Among those common customary and cultural practices developed and shared by Wolloye society is *Wodaja*.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia, and Travels into the Interior of that Country* (London, 1814), p.300

¹⁴¹ Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia with some Account of the Later Emperor Theodore, His Country and people*, London, F. Cass 1970{1868}, p. 290-91)

¹⁴² Asnake Ali, *A Historical Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in Wollo 1872-1917*, p. 263

¹⁴³ Brian J. Yates, *Invisible Actors . . .*, p. 107

¹⁴⁴ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Muslim integration into Western cultures*, p. 8

Wedaja is a prayer ceremony by a group of shaykhs which during instances of poverty, frequent disease, personal problems, and general insecurity. It is a customary practice which only occurs in Wollo. Isenberg who saw the ceremony wrote that:

The Wollo *Gallas* are much engaged in saying prayers and in blessing the country. They observe a custom which I have never seen with other Mahomedans. They assemble early in the morning, say their prayers, take coffee, and Tohjid (sort of tea), and smoke tobacco. This ceremony is called Wodacha. It lasts on Wednesday and Friday till after midday. They believe that they receive revelations from Allah (God) on the Wodacha. On such occasions, they particularly request from the Allah that he will give them cows, clothes, and whatever they want; that their Chief may find gold and silver; and that he may daily become stronger. I once heard them pray in this manner.¹⁴⁵

Originally Wadaja is said to have been derived from Oromo traditional belief, and it was practiced by Muslim Oromos. Nonetheless, Christian Amharas shared in the practice. From this we can see the influence of the Oromo upon the Muslims and Christian Amharas of Wollo.

Another customary practice which is exercised among the Wolloyes regardless of their religion is a prayer known as *Fatima Qori*,¹⁴⁶ the bowl of Fatima. It is a traditional prayer ceremony for a pregnant woman at the ninth month of her pregnancy. It is performed in the name of Fatima, who is said to have been one of the daughters of the Prophet Muhammad. The aim of the ceremony is

¹⁴⁵ Isenbrg and Krapf, p. 323-324 Though Isenberg mentioned the Wodaja prayer is done in in the day time, informants explained that it is occurred in the night time. (Throughout the night time)

¹⁴⁶ *Fatima Qori* is similar to baby showers in terms of it being a gathering in connection with the delivery or expected birth of a child, or the transformation of a woman into a mother. But, unlike modern baby showers it is not aimed at showering the expectant mother with gifts. *Fatima Qori* is intended to make prayers which wish for a calm delivery. Similarly, to baby showers, only women are invited to participate in *Fatima Qori*.

to supplicate for an easier labour for the woman. During the ceremony porridge is presented in three big bowls known as ‘Qori’. Alongside the porridge coffee is also being prepared. This is followed by older Muslim women sitting and giving their blessings in the name of Fatima. Christian women have also participated in the prayer ceremony.¹⁴⁷

Likewise, at birth the same pray is done in the name of St. Mary for a safe delivery. When the pregnant woman starts to go into labour other women in the vicinity gather at her home and pray saying “*Mariam mariat Mariam mariat*” which translates to “ Oh Mary give her mercy!; Oh Mary give her mercy!” Among the Christian population it is widely believed that the mother of Jesus, St Mary, would ease the pain of delivery. Thus, the ladies continue to pray in the name of Mary until the woman gives birth.¹⁴⁸

In such away, in Wollo, Christians participate in *Fatima Qori* and Muslims pray in the name of Mary. This is a living witness of togetherness and peaceful co-existence in the province. According to Rukya this concept is not Islamic, but rather a common practice developed by Wolloye society.¹⁴⁹ When the Muslims pray in the name of Mary, they are using the borrowed concept of the Christians that Mary helps people relieve from their troubles.

In addition to the interpenetration of such customary practices, the people of Wollo also shared ritual practices among each other. Meron notes the presence of a Christian pilgrimage center in Wollo which accommodates Muslims and traditional belief adherents. There was also a tradition of visiting the tombs of Muslim Sheikhs and consulting the sheikhs living descendants in case of

¹⁴⁷ Rukya Hassen, “Genres and Public Events to Understand Discourse in Social Context: A Critical Discourse Analysis of ‘Fatima Kori’”, *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*, Vol.21, 2016, p. 23

¹⁴⁸ Informants: W/o Worke Kassa and Wubayeku Worku

¹⁴⁹ Rukya Hassen, *Genres and Public Events to Understand Discourse in Social Context*, p.26; Informants: W/o Ansha Adem and W/o Aminat Seid

personal problems, illness and other affliction among the Christian community of Wollo.¹⁵⁰

While Christians consult Muslim Sheikhs, Muslims sometimes accept the mediation efforts of Christian priests and the healing power of Christian priests and saints. They even believe in the veneration of saints, who are mediators between God and humans. Due to the intermixture between the followers of the two religions, there are many cases of people converting to the other faith and then returning to the first.

In addition to the above mentioned cultural and ritual practices, the Wollo community shared various ways of life. A good illustration is marriage. Marriage between Christians and Muslims is rare in other parts of Ethiopia but occur regularly in Wollo. This said to have cemented the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Wollo. Thus, in Wollo the Amahara, Oromo, Christian and Muslims became completely intermixed, and one finds them in almost all Wollo families. When we look at the full names of individuals born from such intermixed families, they are mostly composed of Amhara/Christian, Muslim and Oromo names - a Muslim first name with an Amhara middle name and an Oromo surname. In Wollo, pure Amharic names are common within the traditional Muslim community. All of which can be an indication of the province as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious area. Names are a valuable source of information. They can indicate gender, marital status, birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and position within a family or even within a society.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Meron Zeleke, "We are the same but different": Accounts of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Adherents of Islamic Sufi Saints". *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2014, p. 196; Informants: Sheikh Ousman Abebe and Ato Abate Assefa

¹⁵¹ Kgabo Lawrance Mphela, "An Analysis of Personal Naming in The Moletjie Area of The Limpopo Province: An Onomastic Approach". MA Thesis, University of Limpopo, 2010. p. 1

It is this building of common cultural practices that makes peaceful co-existence in Wollo possible. The intermixture which occurred was not simply limited to marriages; joint activities such as the construction of temples also occurred. The legacy of this intimacy of the Wolloye¹⁵² society can still be observed. Muslims in Wollo participate in the construction of churches for Christians, and they in turn participate in mosque construction.¹⁵³

The new St. Gabriel Cathedral, at Dessie, the capital of the former Wollo province,¹⁵⁴ is a spectacular example in this regard. Among the 13 Committee members who took the initiative of the construction of the Church in 1975, six of the Committee members were Muslims. During the course of construction, they delivered financial and labour contributions. An example of what Gelawdewos meant in stating that Wollo is a “microcosm [of] Ethiopia and [an] exemplar of Ethiopian unity.”¹⁵⁵

Wollo is a place where people of different ethnic groups, beliefs and cultures are believed to have coexisted peacefully. The languages spoken in the region are Amharic, Agew, Oromo, Tigray, Afar and Argoba. That is why John Abbink explained the present-day Wollo as an “ethnic amalgam of Amhara, Argoba, Agew, Oromo and Afar peoples.” Due to their intermixing, the people do not want to identify themselves by their ethnic groups rather by the

¹⁵² Wolloye is meant the people of Wollo

¹⁵³ Even it is reported that Muslims in Wollo are committed to take care of Christian Churches which are on the verge of closing due to the diminishing number of Christians. For instance, in a small rural village called Ligo situated at Addis Ababa-Dessie road, there is still a Church called Ligo Georgis. It is located nearly half distance between Dessie and Kombolcha towns. When the number of Christians around diminished, the diocese and the clergymen decided to demolish the Church and evacuate and relocate it to other areas where there are Christians. This transfer of the *tabot* was heard among the Muslim residents of the area. They were all dissatisfied with the decisions of the Christians. They asked not to relocate and promised to guard the church.

¹⁵⁴ Currently, Dessie is the capital of South Wollo zone

¹⁵⁵ Ghelawdewos Araia, “Wollo: Microcosm Ethiopia and Exemplar of Ethiopian Unity”. *Institute of Development and Education for Africa & Inc.*, 2011, p. 1 www.africanidea.org/Wollo.pdf

place, ‘Wolloyye’ (the Wollo person).¹⁵⁶ When one from Wollo province asked from which ethnic group they are, they reply I am Wolloye rather than associating themselves with a specific ethnic group.

Many social scientists concluded that religious belief is a reflection of social structure. There is also evidence from the cross-cultural studies that suggest a relationship between the characteristics of the personality of superhuman beings and patterns of child training.¹⁵⁷ Thus, the intimacy and peaceful co-existence of the Wollo society is the result of thousands of years of interaction among different ethnic and religious groups within the province. The community has a unique history of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. There is a thick historical record that this community exhibits a harmonious and peaceful contact and an intense sense of belongingness. Informants suggest that the Wollo community is far more than mixed. This is because of a strong blood tie due to the intermarriage religious and ethnic groups.¹⁵⁸

In this regard, Abbink described “The Wollo region exemplifies socio-cultural hybridity, pragmatic tolerance, and the accommodation of diversity. . . . It has to be noted that there is considerable diversity within the Muslim communities of Ethiopia . . . There are also notable regional divergences: the situation and experience of Muslims outside of Wollo for instance in Harar, Arsi, Jimma or the Somali region can be quite different.”¹⁵⁹ This is because in Wollo the society is more amalgamated due to the intermarriage and sharing a variety of common customary and cultural practices. Historical records clearly indicate that the people of Wollo had

¹⁵⁶ Getachew Mekonen, *Wollo: Country’s Context* . . . , pp. 17-18; John Abbink, “Transformation of Islam and Communal Relations in Wollo Ethiopia”. In: *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, Benjamin F. Soares and Rene Otayek (Ed), Palgrave, 2007, p. 68

cus Ed.), 1973, p. 26

¹⁵⁸ Rukya Hassen, *Genres and Public Events* . . . , 23; Informants: Ato Iyasu Abera, Ato Getachewu Abera

¹⁵⁹ John Abbink, *Transformation of Islam and Communal Relations in Wollo Ethiopia*, p. 66

a peaceful co-existence in contrast to many parts of the world. According to Rukya, Wollo is one of the very few places in the world where Muslims and Christians co-exist peacefully.¹⁶⁰

All of these developments can be seen as a direct result of the demographic changes brought about after the expansion and settlement of the Oromo people in Wollo. A change that brought about multi-ethnic and multi religious society; a change that led to the emergence of common customary and cultural practices that enabled the society to live in peaceful coexistence.



¹⁶⁰ Rukya Hassen, *Language as an Index of Identity, Power, Solidarity and Sentiment in the Multicultural Community of Wollo*, Journal of Socialomics, Volume 5 • Issue 3, 2016, p. 1

Chapter Three

Wollo during the *Zemene Mesafint* (1769-1855)

Introduction

In 1769 a period of political crisis and fragmentation in Ethiopian history, which is known as *Zemene Mesafint* literally means ‘Era of Princes’, had begun. It lasted up until 1855. It was a period when the country was divided within itself into several provinces with no effective central authority. It was a period characterized by weak Emperors and powerful provincial lords.¹ The Chroniclers of the time and Mordechai Abir referred to the period as the “Era of Princes” or the “Era of Judges”. Most of the historians who wrote on nineteenth century Ethiopia adopted this name. Tim Carmichael preferred to call the period the “Era of the nobility”. For him, the name *Zemene Mesafint* was taken from the Old Testament which refers to a period of judges. Trimingham regarded *Zemene Mesafint* as “a period which witnessed the triumph of regionalism.”²

Zemene Mesafint was a period of regionalism, a period during which imperial authority was broken down. It was a period in which the emperors were reduced to little more than figureheads confined to the capital city of Gondar. In relation to this Edmond Keller wrote “Between 1769 and 1855 the Abyssinian Empire became moribund and eventually ceased to exist in all but its name. This was a period that came to be known as the ‘Era of Princes’ (*Zemene Mesafint*), and

¹ Harold Marcus, “A History of Ethiopia”, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 48

² Tim Carmichael, “Approaching Ethiopian history: Addis Ababa and local governance in Harar, c. 1900 to 1950”. PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2001, p.17; J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. London: Frank Cass and Co, Ltd., 1965, p.104

parochialism among regional nobles reached crisis proportions. Abyssinia was then only nominally a state, being ruled by fifteen different figure headed emperors during the period.”³

This period was characterized by civil wars between the warlords and monarch on the one hand, and between the regional nobilities themselves on the other. The strong regional nobles contested among themselves to collect taxes, dispense land grants, award military and civil titles, negotiate trade and foreign affairs, and to be the supreme judges. More importantly, provincial governors were in constant rivalry to control the title of *Ras Bitwadam*, a decisive position equivalent to the English head of the governors or Lords.⁴ The *Ras Bitwadam* had the power to make or unmake kings, to crown someone from the royal family or to remove them from the throne. They sat on the top of the state and thereby secured the reins of political power for themselves. All the regional governors of northern Ethiopia contested among themselves to assume the office of the kingmaker and to dominate the politics of the court. Generally, the period between 1769 and 1855 was the time when the Ethiopian Empire declined and eventually ceased to exist as one strong polity beyond its name.

Much has been said about *Zemene Mesafint*. This dissertation does not intend to give a detailed analysis of the period. It rather aims at highlighting its impact on the socio-political life of Wollo province. *Zemene Mesafint* led to the establishment of numerous socio-political events in Wollo. Among others, it paved the way for the establishment of local dynasties in Wollo. The contemporary political situation of the country created a favorable condition for those Oromo groups who settled in Wollo to establish their own political entities.

³ Edmond Keler, “Making and Remaking State and Nation in Ethiopia”, In: *Borders, Nationalism and the African State*, Ricardo Rene Laremont (Ed), Boulder. Co: Lynne Rienner, 2005, p. 89

⁴ Chris Prouty Rosenfeld, “Eight Ethiopian Women of The Zemene Mesafint (c. 1769-1855).” *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1979), p. 63).

There were a variety of factors for the success of those Oromo leaders in establishing strong dynasties in Wollo province. The first, that they used Islam as an ideology for building up a local power base and consolidating power. Together with territorial expansion, they expanded Islam into newly conquered areas. Secondly, they preferred to appoint Muslim religious leaders upon the newly conquered areas. This helped impose Islamic laws in the areas.⁵ Among the different dynasties established by the Oromo groups who settled in Wollo, the two strongest dynasties were the *Mammedoch* and the *Wereseh*.⁶

3.1 The Rise of Local Dynasties in Wollo

3.1.1 The *Mammedoch* Ruling Family of Wollo

Among the different dynasties established by the Oromo groups who settled in Wollo, the oldest and strongest is the *Mammedoch* dynasty. It had its origin from the Oromos who settled around Wara-Babo. These Oromo groups are said to have come from Arusi under the leadership of their clan leader, Babo. They settled east of Lake Ardibo and renamed the area Wara-Babo after Babo.⁷

After the death of Babo, his son Godana took the leadership of Wara-Babo. He gained the acceptance of the *Areloch*, an Oromo group that arrived earlier in the area. He married one of the

⁵ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wollo: 1855-1908". B.A. Thesis. Department of History, Haile Selassie I University, 1972, pp.4-5

⁶ In addition to *Mammedoch* and *Woresheikh*, other many small chiefdoms and local dynasties were also established in the region. Among these were *Qallu* and *Garfa*.

⁷ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wollo: 1872-1916". MA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1983, p.1; Zergaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo: 1783-1850," BA Thesis (Haylä Selassé I University: Department of History, 1972 E.C), p.19.

daughters of the chief of Tahuladare. This dynastical marriage laid the ground for the Muslim ruling family which dominated the region for nearly two centuries. Following the death of his maternal grandfather, the chief of Tahuladare, Ali Godana took on the chieftainship of Tahuladare together along with the domain of his paternal grandfather, Wara-Babo.⁸ Ali married a lady who belonged to the noble family of Wadla-Delanta. From this marriage a son, Mohammed Ali was born. It is this son of Ali, Mohammed Ali, better known as *Abba Jibo* Mohammed, by his horse name that is considered as being the real founder of the *Mammedoch* dynasty. The name of the dynasty is derived from him.⁹

After taking Tahuladare and Wara-Babo under his command, *Abba Jibo* Mohammed controlled the various Oromo groups who had been fighting amongst themselves.¹⁰ It is claimed that the quite well-known war song “ይበላሃል ጅቦ ይቆራርጥሃል” was composed in recognition of his fighting skill and rule in Wollo.¹¹

The reign of Mohammed Ali was important for two reasons: the further expansion of the domain of the *Mammedoch* and the consolidation of Islam in the region. After he won the domain of Wara-Babo and Tahuladare, *Abba Jibo* Mohammed apparently directed his expansion towards Wara -Himano. He also defeated Dori, who was the hereditary ruler of Amhara Sayint.¹² Thus, Wara-Himano becomes his stronghold of himself and of his successors. That is why the

⁸ Zergaw Asfera, Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , p.20; Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo, Ethiopia reform and reaction*, (Leidon: Boston University, 2001), p.117-118.

⁹ Hussien, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo*. . . , pp.118-119. It was a tradition to give horse names to emperors and the ruling classes of Ethiopia. These names were given to honor their character, generally following their exploits at war. They were explained through poetry. For further information on this naming tradition read Mahteme-Selassie Wolde-Mesqel, “A study of the Ethiopian Culture of Horse-Names.” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol.7 No.2 (Haylä Selassé I University, Department of History, July 1969), p.195

¹⁰ Ye Dessie Ketema [The Town of Dessie], MS No. 688, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated, p.37

¹¹ Zergaw Asfera, “Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , p.23; Informants: *Liqa-Kahenat* Taye Tsegaw and Ato Samuel Mesganaw.

¹² H.Weld Blundel (trans. & ed.), *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840 with Translations and Notes*. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.274-279 & 359

Mammedoch dynasty is interchangeably referred to as the Wara-Himano ruling family.¹³ Starting from *Abba Jibo* the rulers of the *Mammedoch* were styled with the title of *Imam*.¹⁴

Most of the conquests of the *Mammedoch* were made by *Abba Jibo* Mohammed. From Wara-Himano he waged various wars aimed at incorporating the different independent chieftains in the different parts of Wollo.¹⁵ Concerning this, a manuscript at the Institute of Ethiopia Studies explained: “. . . አባ ጅቦ መሀመድም በጣም ጀግናና ባታዋቂ በመሆኑ ከግራና ከቀኝ ያሉትን አገሮች በባላባትነቱ ወሰጥ አደረጋቸዉ.”¹⁶ Which means: . . . since *Abba Jibo* Mohammed was a brave fighter; he brought the surrounding chieftains under his domination.

There are various factors for the success of *Abba Jibo* Mohammed. The first one is that he used Islam as an ideology for building up a local power base and consolidating his power. Together with territorial expansion, he expanded Islam in the newly conquered areas. He is also known for his conversion of many Christian Amharas. In this regard, he is said to have demolished various churches and slaughtered many Christians.¹⁷ Secondly, he preferred to appoint Muslim religious leaders upon the newly conquered areas. This helped him to impose Islamic laws in the areas. The third factor is the revival of trade in the area and the opening of Tajura trade route which linked Wollo across Awsa. This enabled Mohammed and his successors to earn a considerable amount of income to build up their power base.¹⁸

The *Mammedoch* dynasty reached the highest of its power during the reigns of the first two successors of *Abba Jibo*, Amade, who is nicknamed as Kollasse Amade and his son Liban

¹³ Zergaw Asfera, Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , p. 23

¹⁴ W. Isenberg, and J.L. Krapf, *Journals of the Rev. Messrs: Isenberg and Krapf Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society*, (London: Burnside and Seeley, 1843), p.362.

¹⁵ Fekadu Begna, A Tentative History of Wollo . . . , p.4

¹⁶ Ye Dessie Ketema, MS, No.688, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated, p.37

¹⁷ Zergaw Asfera, Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , pp. 4-5; Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia* . . . , p.281, Hussien, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo* . . . , p.118.

¹⁸ Hussien, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo*, . . p.121

Amade in the 1790s and the first quarter of the eighteenth century. They conquered areas such as Wara-Qallu, Dawunt and Dalanta and brought them under their wings.¹⁹

Kollasse Amade who is said to have been a strong warrior continued the expansionist policy of his father. He established the dominance of the *Mammedoch* in the whole region once known as Bete Amhara. He was able to make the *Mammedoch* dominant power in Wollo region. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the *Mammedoch* had their hegemony accepted in the various parts of Wollo: Ambasel, Qallu, Borena, Wore-Illu and Amhara Sayint. The territory extended from Abbay river in the west to Qallu and Garfa area in the east and Wänchit and Jama rivers in the south.²⁰ Moreover, under the leadership of Kollasse Amade, the *Mammedoch* had even started to take part in the power struggle among the lords of northern Ethiopia at Gonder.²¹

Kollasse died in 1815 while he was suppressing the revolts of Laga-Hida and Laga-Gora. Liban Amade who succeeded him was a far stronger warrior. Like his predecessors, he kept the domination of the *Mammedoch* over Wollo.²² He subdued districts that were rebelling since the reign of his father.²³ According to the account of the Protestant missionaries Isenberg and Krapf, the territory of *Imam* Liban extended over four or five days of travel from west to east.²⁴

Following the death of *Imam* Liban in ca.1825, a steady decline was witnessed in the *Mammedoch* dynasty because of the power rivalry between the three sons of Liban: *Abba* Bula

¹⁹ Asnake Ali. Aspects of the Political History of Wollo. . . , p.2; Fekadu Begna, A Tentative History of Wollo. . . , p.5. Kollasie's mother, Waizero Alkon, was a daughter of a Christian noble family in the district of Delenata

²⁰ Zergaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , pp.38-39; Hussien, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo*, p.123. The area encompasses the central, Eastern and Western part of the present day Wollo

²¹ Blundell, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia* . . . , pp.463-464; Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw.

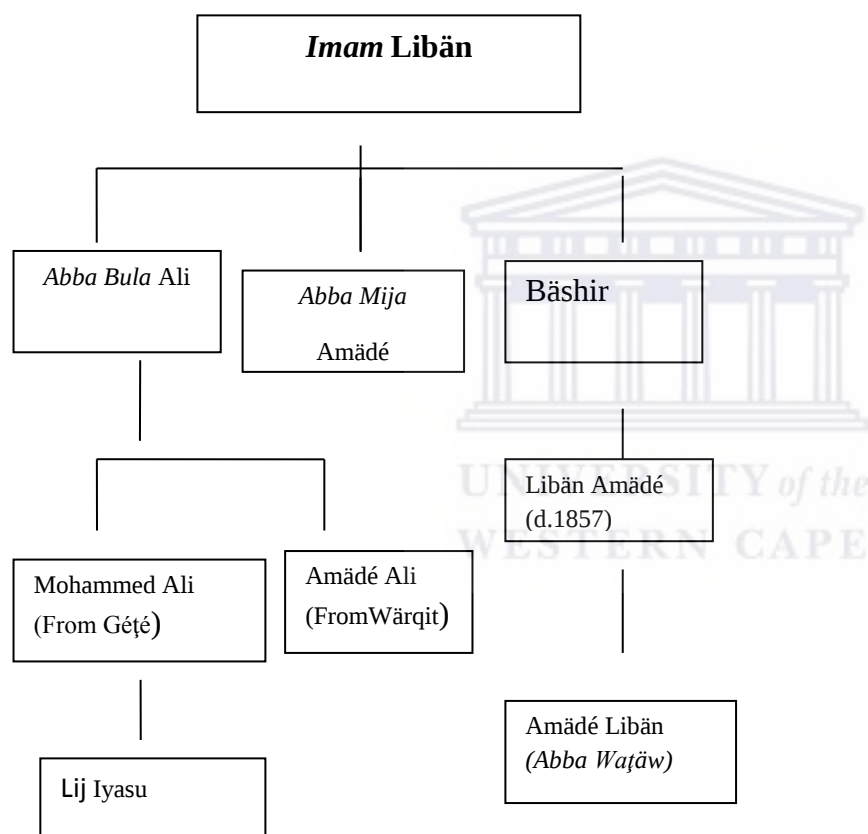
²² Zergaw Asfera, *Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . ,* p.52

²³ Hussien, *Islam in the nineteenth century Wollo*, p.124

²⁴ Isenberg & Krapf, *Journals of the Rev. Messrs. . . ,* p.347.

Ali, *Abba Mija Amadé* and *Bashir*.²⁵ Due to this split in the Wara-Himano ruling family, many areas who wished to be independent of the dynasty's domination began to break away from it. This situation further weakened the dynasty.²⁶

After a long struggle among the three sons of Liban, *Abba Bula Ali* became *Imam* in 1842 and presided over Wollo until his death in 1852. However, the rivalry continued up to the 1850s and 1860s among the sons of these three contenders.²⁷



Genealogical Table showing the Mammedoch Ruling Family of Wollo

²⁵ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wollo p.2

²⁶ Isenberg & Krapf, *Journals of the Rev. Messrs. . .*, pp.324-325.

²⁷ Zergaw Asfera, *Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . .*, p.68; Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wollo p.6.

3.1.2 The *Wereseh* ruling dynasty of Yejju

The Wereseh dynasty which dominated Northern Ethiopia during *Zemene Mesafint* derived from the Yejju ruling family. As in the case of many of the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia, the origin of the Yejju people and their ruling dynasty, the *Wereseh*, largely remains uncertain.

There are different assumptions on the origin of the Yejju people. An oral tradition of the *Wereseh* themselves relates the origin of the ruling family with Sheikh Omar, who is believed to be the father figure of the family. The tradition mentioned that during the wars of Imam Ahmed (Grag), Sheikh Omar, the eponymous forefather of the *Weresh* family came from Arabia and settled in Yejju area. He is said to have married numerous wives and begot many children. Later his decedents came to be known as the *Wereseh* or people of the sheikh.²⁸

Other sources revealed that the Yejju, originally called El-Ejju, until the sixteenth century were residents of the district of Qawat, in the South Eastern part of Bete Amhara. These sources cited that they were Christians at the beginning of the conquest of the Imam but a large part of them embraced Islam during the Islamization process of Imam Ahmed. Many El-Ejju men are said to have let to accompany the Imam in his conquest of Bete Amhara and Yejju areas. They did not return to their homeland after the collapse of Imam Ahmed's conquest.²⁹ Rather they settled in

²⁸ Awoke Asmare, "The Career of Ras Gugsa Wolle 1877-1930". MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1996, p. 1; Molla Tikuye, "The Rise and Fall of the Yejju Dynasty 1784-1980" In: Bahru Z., Richard P., and Tadesse Beyene(eds) *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vo.I, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 1994, p.197

²⁹ The reason why they did not return to their home land is that because Muslims from across the Awash had occupied Qawat

Angot/Yejju area and gave their name to the area they settled and became absorbed into the surrounding societies in subsequent centuries.³⁰

The chronicler of Imam Ahmed, Shihab ad-Din who stayed in Yejju during the campaign, mentioned that the Yejju were Christians and spoke a language that could have been Amharic. Another account shows that Yejju adopted its name from the tribe of Oromo people who migrated and settled there. Yejju is the name of the Oromo clan that settled in this area during the sixteenth century Oromo population movement.³¹

All the above sources have no difference regarding the time when the Yejju emerged in the region.³² Their difference is in the exact place of their origin. Thus, we can conclude that the Weresh/Yejju are the results of various layers of people: the Amhara of Angot, remnants of the forces of Gragn, and the migrating Yejju Oromo.

Gwangul believed to be the founder of the Yejju ruling family which referred to as the *Wereseh* dynasty. But it is under his son, Ras Ali I that the *Wereseh* became the leading power of the time and dominated the Ethiopian politics during the Era of *Zemene Mesafint*.

Though it was under Ali that the Wereseh become the dominant power, the Wolloyes (Wollo Oromos) had a close relationship with the Imperial court in Gonder since the time of Emperor Susenyos (r. 1721-1730). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Oromo settled in Wollo were rapidly assimilating themselves socially, and to a lesser extent linguistically to the Amhara

³⁰ Merid Wolde-Aregay, Southern Ethiopia and the Christian kingdom 1508-1708 with Special Reference to the *Galla Migrations and their Consequences*, PhD Thesis, University of London, 1971, pp.138-139; Habtamu Mengistie, *Land Tenure and Agrarian Social Structure In Ethiopia, 1636-1900*. PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011, p. 240

³¹ Stenhouse, Paul Lester, (Trans), *Futuh Al-Habasha: The Conquest of Abyssinia (Futuh Al-habasha)* by Sihab ad-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Qader, Tsehai, Publishers, 2003, p. 236
Yejju Oromo belongs to the Barentu branch of Oromo people.

³² i.e during the 16th century (during the wars of Imam Ahmed and in the time following his collapse)

norms. In addition to their assimilation, they got access to the imperial court in Gonder by being soldiers and retainers. Because of their ability to warfare, the Wollo Oromo were recruited in large numbers as soldiers for the imperial army in Gonder. As Abir underlines, “the Gonderine rulers came more and more to depend upon their *Galla* troops and the *Galla* nobility was an accepted feature in the Gonder courts.”³³ As a result in the following decades, they became powerful political figures in the court of Gonder and later received important offices under Emperor Bakafa (r. 1719-1730).³⁴

They rose to the highest levels of political authority. Their language, Afan Oromo, is said to have dominated the Imperial court. The Scottish traveller, James Bruce, who visited Gonder during the period under discussion, wrote that “Nothing was heard at the palace but the Afan Oromo language”³⁵

In addition to this, a marriage alliance between Gonderine Imperial rulers and Wollo Oromos is said to have cemented the relations between the two parties. In Ethiopian history, it was a common practice for the Christian kings and nobility to marry across the religious divide for political reasons. Such dynastic marriages became more widespread during the *Zemene Masafint* particularly between the Muslim Oromo families of Wollo and the weak Christian monarchs residing in Gondar. It was Mentwab, the wife of Emperor Bekaffa, who arranged marriage alliance between her son Emperor Iyasu II and a Muslim Oromo princess from Wollo, Wabi, the daughter of Amito, a powerful Wolloye chief. From this union, Iyoas was born who later

³³ Mordechai Abir. *The Era of Princes: The Challenge of Islam; The Reunification of The Christian Empire 1769-1855*(Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1968, p. 27

³⁴ Awoke Asmare, “The Career of Ras Gugsa Wolle. . . , p. 4. Some sources indicate that the Wollo Oromos first entered the Imperial palace at Gonder as invited guests of Susenyos.

³⁵ Bruce, James. *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768,1769, 1770, 1771,1772 and 1773*, 5 vols. Endinburgh: Gregg International Publishers Limited, Reprinted, (1792) Vol. 2, .667

succeeded his father Iyasu II. This dynastic marriage alliance had remarkable importance for the Oromo lords of Wollo in gaining further access to the royal court and dominating the Empire since the 1780s.³⁶

On Iyoas' accession to the throne his maternal uncles, Lubo and Birille, entered Gonder with large followers of cavalry and infantry from Wore Himeno. They had been influential in the court of King Iyoas at Gonder. Lubo was declared governor of Begemder and Amhara/Wollo. The entrance of Amito family i.e. Wubit and her brothers, Lubo and Brille in the court life of Gonder marked the growth of the influence of Wollo ruling families in the Imperial government.³⁷

Despite the above close interactions between the Wolloye lords and Gondrine royal families, it was during Ras Ali I that the Wollo ruling dynasties particularly the *Wereseh* became strong enough and ruled much of the Ethiopian Empire during *Zemene Mesafint*.

In the 1780s, Ras Ali I started his career as a simple soldier of Tekle Giorgis's royal army in Gonder. Soon he was first appointed as one of the commanders of the king's army. However, later in 1784 he fought against Emperor Tekle Giorgis (r. 1779-1784) and defeated and exiled him to Ambasel, near his own native land of Yejju. He then declared his seizure of the highest office in the imperial court.³⁸ After removing Tekle Giorgis from power, Ali replaced him by Iyasu III (r. 1784-1788). In the royal chronicle it is described that when Iyasu III crowned on 18

³⁶ Zergaw Asfera. "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Wollo, . . .", p.24; Habtamu Mengistie, *Land Tenure*. . . , p.39. According to Crumey by the late 18th century, very few of the Abyssinian nobility lacked a significant admixture of *Galla* blood. It was because of the widespread participation by the *Galla* in public affairs. (Society and Ethnicity, p. 278)

³⁷ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, 5 vols. Endinburgh: Gregg International Publishers Limited, Reprinted, (1792), vol.4, pp. 151-154; Zergaw, p.14

³⁸ Wudu Tafete, A Political History of Wag and Lasta c.1543-1919. MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1995, p. 102

February 1784, he has given the highest appointment to Ras Ali I of Yejju. Ali became *Bitwaded* as well as *Ras* and ruler of Begemder.³⁹

Ali is said to have expanded the territories of the Yejju domain. Under his rule the territorial limit includes the present-day districts of Wadla-Delanta, Dawunt, Waro, Shedeho-Meket, Kulamaso, Raya-Zobl, Guraworke, Angot and Lasta. They ruled from different centres such as Woldia, Geregera, and Dabra Tabor.⁴⁰

In such a way Ali I who established *Wereseh*'s overlordship over other regions and thereby transformed Yejju from an insignificant outlier to an influential province. Ali had succeeded in making *Wereseh* the strongest dynasty of the *Zemene Mesafint*.

3.2 Strength of Wollo Dynasties and their Domination in the Imperial Court

As discussed above, *Zemene Mesafint* was a rivalry between the known regional lords of northern Ethiopia especially Tigray, Semen, Dembia, Begemder, Gonder, Gojjam and Wollo for the title of *Ras Bitwaded*.⁴¹

The Wollo ruling dynasties were successful in becoming champion in this struggle for power. No one was successful in controlling the bitwadedship and the politics of the country like Wollo dynasties in general and that of Yejju during the period under discussion.

³⁹ Bludde, *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia* . . . , p. 342 and 365

⁴⁰ Molla, *The Rise and Fall of the Yejju Dynasty* . . . , p. 99; Informants; Ato Belay Abebe and Kassa Gedamu. Yejju's territorial extent was as large as the present day northern Wollo administrative region

⁴¹ Kofi Darkwah, *A New Approach to Ethiopia in the 18th and 19th C.* research Review (1967), p.46

Many of the available sources have given the credit of dominating Ethiopian politics during *Zemene Mesafint* for Ras Mikael Sehul of Tigray or the Tigrean nobles in general. For instance, Crummey wrote “Ras Mikael one of the well-known rulers of eighteenth-century Tigray, was by far the single most powerful lord in the Ethiopian kingdom by the 1760s. It was Mikael who changed the course of national politics in the eighteenth century by setting the precedence as a kingmaker to subsequent lords in the country.” Tefera also alleged “The king in Gonder was reduced to puppet in the hands of the Tigrean regents who were virtually kingmakers”.⁴²

Of course, Ras Mikael Sehul was one of the influential regional lords especially at the beginning of *Zemene Mesafint*. He entered Gonder early in 1768, took control of political power, deposed king Iyoas and appointed Yohannes II.⁴³ But it was for a very short span of time, for not more than for three years that Ras Mikael Sehul dominated court politics. He promptly was defeated by the coalition of Wolloye Oromo and Gonderine royalists and removed from office in 1771.⁴⁴

When we examine the matter in terms of time scope, it was the Yejju lords that were central and active king makers throughout the period of the *Zemene Mesafint*. In 1784 Ali I removed Emperor Tekle Giorgis from power and replaced with Iyasu III. Four years after he had deposed Tekle Giorgis, Ras Ali I is said to have disillusioned with Iyasu III and brought Tekle Giorgis back to his throne in 1788. When he brought the king back to his throne, he made sure that the king depended fully on him and the other members of the Yejju ruling family.⁴⁵

⁴² Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000), p.p.124 ; Tefera Haile-Sellassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1991: From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy*, London ; Kegan Paul International ; 1997, p. 14

⁴³ Donald Crummey, “Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of Christian Ethiopia during the *Zamana Masafent*”. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. 1975, p. 273

⁴⁴ Shiferaw Bekele, “Reflections on the Power Elite of the Wära Seh Mäsfenat (1786-1853)”. In: *Annales d’Ethiopie*. Volume 15, année 1990, p. 159

⁴⁵ Wudu Tafete, “A Political History of Wag and Lasta. . .”, p.108

From Ali I (r.1786 -1788) to Ras Ali II (r.1832-1853), for about seven decades, the guardianship of the king of kings passed into the hands of the *Wereseh* ruling family of Yejju. Six successors of Ali I: Aligaz (r.1788-1793), Gugsu I (r. 1800-1825), Yimam (r.1825-1828), Marye (r.1828-1831), Dori (1831) and Ali II or Ali the junior (1831-1853) ruled as *Ras Bitwadam* or guardians of the puppet emperors at Gonder.⁴⁶ Thus, assuming control of the crucial position of the *Ras Bitwadam*, guardianship of the kings, the Wollo Oromo ruling dynasties involved in king making activities in Gonder and dominated the politics of *Zemene Mesafint*.

Regarding with the domination of Wollo dynasties, Shiferaw Bekele said “In all this disintegration and chaos and anarchy, the Yaju lords maintained predominance over the other lords”. Mohammed Hassen added on this that the Yejju Wollo nobility remained a dominant force in the political landscape of the Christian kingdom during *Zemene Mesafint*.⁴⁷

Besides dominating the local politics at home, the *Wereseh* rulers, especially Ali II, had established independent foreign relations especially with the British government by the time when Ethiopia slept forgetful of the world.⁴⁸ One of the letters Ali wrote to Queen Victoria deals with the exchange of gifts between the queen and himself. In his letter, he acknowledged the queen for the gift provided to him. He also mentioned his sending of some gifts for her. Moreover, he requested the queen for firearms and money to be given to his soldiers. In the treaty signed between Great Britain and Abyssinia in 1849, *Ras Ali II* signed himself “Ali King of Habesha (Abyssinia).”

⁴⁶ Abir, *The Era of Princes*. . . ,p.31; Awoke Asmare, “The Career of Ras Gugsu Wolle. . . , p.5; Zergaw Asfera, “Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara Wollo. . . , p.40.

Aligaz deposed Tekle Giorgis in 1789 and crowned Hezqyas (r. 1789-94) (Wudu, p.109)

⁴⁷ Shiferaw Bekele, *Reflections on the Power*. . . , p.158; Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*. Boydell & Brewer Inc, 2017, p. 346

⁴⁸ After the closed-door policy of Emperor Fasiledes (1632- 1664), Ethiopia had stopped foreign relations with the outside world. That is why Gibbon wrote “Ethiopia slept forgetful of the world by whom it was forgotten”

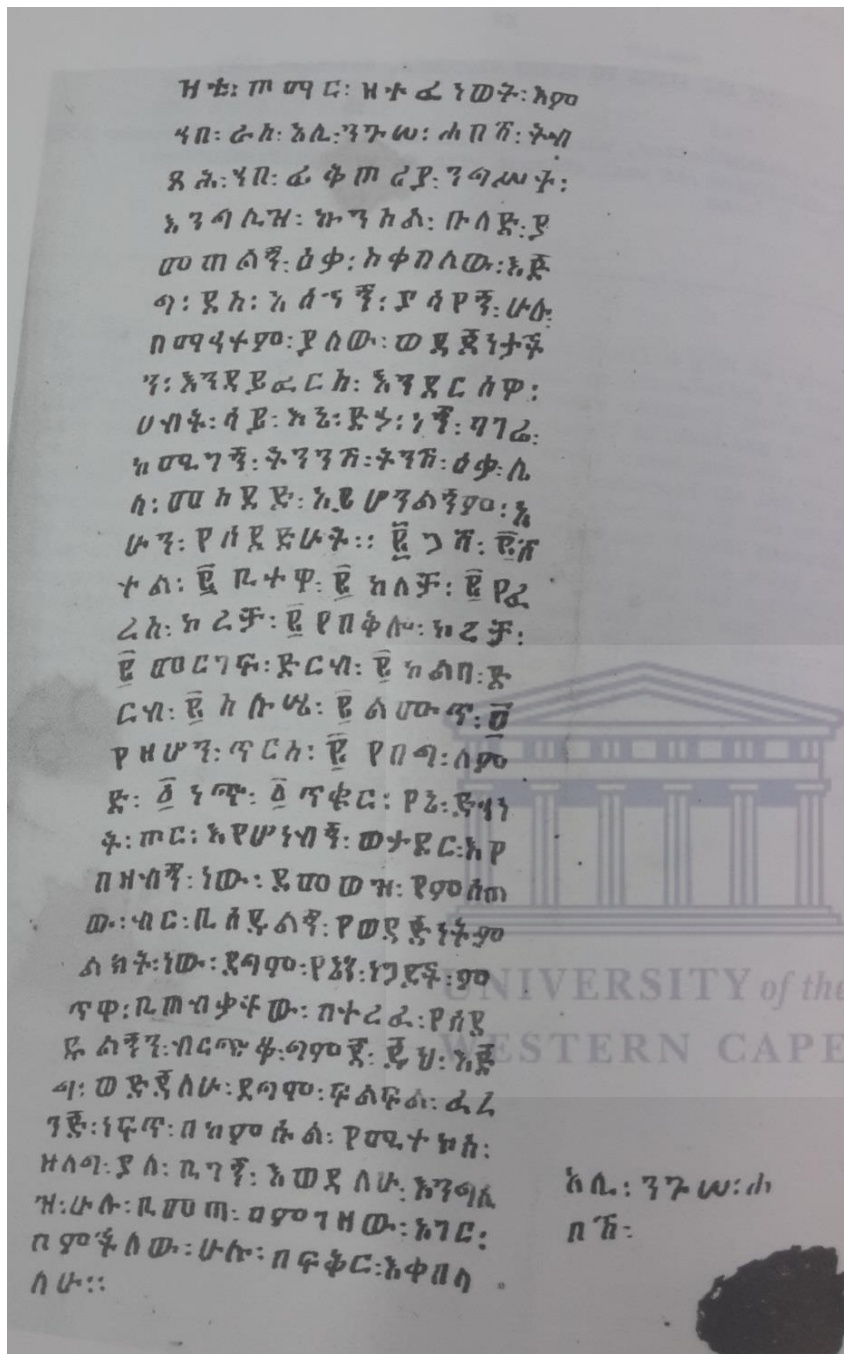


Figure 4 Letter of Ras II to Queen Victoria. From the National Library and Archival Center of Ethiopia

All these shreds of evidence may show the level of the strength of Wollo ruling dynasties and their predominance over the *Zemene Mesafint* Politics. Various factors can be traced for the success of the Wollo ruling dynasties in general and the *Wereseh* in particular.

First is their characteristic of being warriors and fighters. In Wollo there was a traditional encounter which was characterized by frequent internecine feuding which is popularly referred to as “*Waffo Wugia*”⁴⁹ The people were said to have been accustomed to such fighting as a test of their fighting valour. Every man capable of bearing arms was a fighter according to their tradition. Besides, they were good horsemen. Consequently, they are often described in the literature as turbulent and warlike people.⁵⁰ Their notoriety as warriors seems to have eventually paved the road to their strength, political ascendancy and predominance. Second is their marital alliance with the Gonderine royal families. It cemented the political alignment of the Wollo ruling families with the Gonderines and thereby paved the way for the former to dominate the imperial politics.⁵¹

Though the Wollo ruling dynasties got the upper hand politically, social conditions were highly deteriorated. In this period, the peasants of northern Ethiopia in general and Wollo were forced to give military service to fight on the side of their respective regional lords. When Henry Blanc mentioned the situation he saw in Wollo, he wrote: “Every *Galla* is a horseman, every horseman a soldier; and thus is formed a perfect militia, an always ready army, where no discipline is required, no drill but to follow the chief.”⁵² The peasants were also forced to feed the emperor’s soldiers wherever they were stationed. Moreover, during *Zemene Mesafint*, agricultural productivity had been reduced. Because of the insecurity trade has also been discouraged.

⁴⁹ Waffo Wugia was a kind of mock fighting fought by means of spears and swords

⁵⁰ Awoke Asmare, *The Career of Ras Gugsa Welle*. . . , p.2

⁵¹ Ibid, p.4; Oral Informants: Dr Dagnachew Assefa and Ato Mesfin Aragie

⁵² Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., (1868)p.143

To sum up, Zemene Mesafint witnessed a wide range of socio-political transformation in the history of Wollo province. The Wollo ruling families had emerged stronger and occupied important positions not only in the region but also at the imperial court. Despite their strength and political dominance, the Wollo ruling dynasties were considered as illegitimate primarily due to their ethnic and religious backgrounds. The growth of the Muslim Oromo nobilities in Gonder heightened the anxiety of the Amhara and Tigray nobility, who believed that the Christian state was sliding down a rapidly inclining slope toward Islam. For that matter in the royal chronicle it was written:

How is it that the kingdom has become contemptible to striplings and slaves?
How is it the kingdom is laughingstock to the uncircumcised . . .? How is it that
the kingdom is the image of a worthless flower that the children pluck in the
autumn rains? I lament as I ponder over the kingdom, for I was present in its trial
and tribulation. And I weep always without ceasing.⁵³

Finally, the strength and domination of the Wollo dynasties began to be challenged by the second half of the nineteenth century. In the words of Mohammed Hassen “the clouds had already gathered thick and low over the once powerful Oromo dynasties in Wollo”⁵⁴ They were reduced to insignificance following the political and religious consolidation process of emperors Tewodros and Yohannes.

⁵³ Blundel, *Royal Chronicle* . . ., pp. 471-472

⁵⁴ Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom* . . ., p. 345

Chapter Four

Political and Religious Consolidation in Wollo

Introduction

The opening of the second half of the nineteenth century is regarded as a turning point in the political history of north central Ethiopia in general and Wollo province. During this period many socio-political events happened in the country's history. To mention few: By the mid of nineteenth century, the period of political instability, *Zemen Mesafint*, came to an end with the rise of a powerful warrior from Quwara,⁵⁵ Kassa Hailu, the later Emperor Tewodros II. His ascendancy marked the end of the period of regionalism. Coming to the throne in a time of disunity and civil war, he endeavored to reunite the country. He started political consolidation by merging together the disintegrated provinces of the empire. Many scholars regarded this action of the Emperor as the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire.

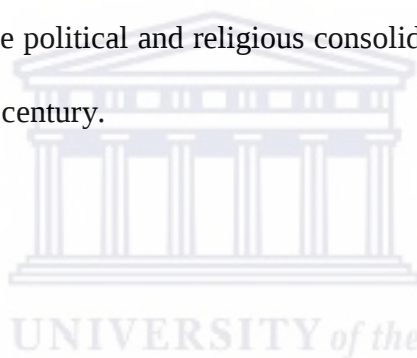
Secondly, this period was a time when Ethiopia faced with external threats especially from Muslim powers: Egypt and Mahadist Sudan from the West, and the Turks along its eastern frontier, the Red Sea coast. Thirdly, by this time Religious uniformity policy was declared by Emperor Yohannes IV which led to the mass conversion of Muslims especially of the Wollo Muslims.⁵⁶ The above mentioned events have their own effect on the socio- political history of Wollo province directly or indirectly.

⁵⁵ Quwara is located in the province of Gonder, in Northwestern Ethiopia

⁵⁶ According to Hussien, two of the most outstanding emperors of the period, Tewodros II and Yohannes IV were alarmed by the progress and revival of Islam in Wollo. He suggested that they perceived Islam, especially Islam in Wollo, as an internal source of a direct challenge to their policy of unification, and, allegedly, as a domestically of external expansionist powers, Egypt and Mahdist Sudan.

In the meantime, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Wollo became an area of central importance. Since it was located between the kingdom of Shewa and the Northern provinces, controlling Wollo was sought as facilitating the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire. As a result, all the principal powers of the time, Tewodros II, Yohannes IV and Menilek II tried to control it.⁵⁷

Thus, the political and religious incorporation of Wollo into the mainstream political life was the central agenda of national politics during the second half of the nineteenth century. Generally, this period was a time when the social, religious, political episodes of the province had shaped. Hence, this chapter overviews the political and religious consolidation of Wollo province during the second half of the nineteenth century.



4.1 Political Consolidation under Emperor Tewodros II

“Since my ancestors, the kings, have until offended our creator, he had handed their kingdom over to the Galla . . . But now ever since I was born, my creator has raised me from the dust and given me power and placed me over the kingdom of my ancestors. By the power of God, I have dislodged the Gallas . . .”

Emperor Tewodros to Queen Victoria

⁵⁷ Fekadu Begna, “A Tentative History of Wollo, 1855-1908,” BA Thesis (Haylä-Selassé I university: Department of History, 1972), p.1; Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw.

Tewodros, the Emperor who started the creation of the modern Ethiopian empire, was ambitious to break the growing power of the provincial rulers and to bring the different provinces under effective central authority.⁵⁸ His coming to the imperial throne is regarded as the opening of the modern period in Ethiopian history. To fulfil his ambition he had to conquer the divided provinces of the empire and bring under his control. Inevitably, Wollo was part of the consolidation policy of the Emperor.⁵⁹

The attitude of Tewodros towards Wollo/Oromo

In the literature of this period, the entry of the Wollo dynasties into the court politics of the Empire and the domination of Imperial power by Wollo dynasties during *Zemene Mesafint* was a danger. In these writings and in the chronicles of Emperors Tewodros and Yohannes, it was argued that *Galla* political dominance during the *Zemene Mesafint* was a curse from God due to the decadence of the Gonderine period.⁶⁰ The records viewed the Wollo Oromos and/or Muslim dynasties who dominated the Empire during *Zemene Mesafint* as a threat to Ethiopia's sovereignty.

For instance, when Zeneb, the chronicler of Emperor Tewodros, explains the status of Ethiopian Empire/politics during *Zemene Mesafint*, he used the term ጠፋ (*Tefa*) literally means lost, an expression which completely discredits the legitimacy of the *Wereseh* dynasty. He also

⁵⁸ Kofi R.H. Darkwah, *Menilek of Ethiopia*, (London: 1972), p.3.

⁵⁹ Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*, (London:Smith, Elder and Co., 1868), p.106; Donald Crummey, "The Violence of Tewodros," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.IX, No.2, 1971, p.111 Richard Pankhurst (Ed), *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 145

⁶⁰ The period which is came to be known as Gonderine period (1636-1769) period is the time when the Imperial government centered at the town of Gonder.

mentioned that it was God who had “raised up” Tewodros to punish and to put an end to all the sin and evil practices in the country before. Thus, he ended the empire of the *Galla*.⁶¹

Tewodros’s attitude towards Wollo was a replication of contemporary thinking. In his letter to Queen Victoria, he reflected his opinion towards Wollo dynasties. He underlined that the domination of Imperial power by Wollo dynasties during *Zemen Mesafint* was a result of the wickedness of his ancestors. He viewed *Galla* dominance as a hindrance to Ethiopia returning to its former glory so that his aim was to dislodge the Wollo ruling dynasties from Imperial politics.⁶²

When the literature of the period and Tewodros used the term *Galla* they were referring the Wollo ruling dynasties with Muslim and Oromo backgrounds. For that matter, it was towards Wollo that Tewodros made a campaign, not to other Oromo settled provinces. Hence, Tewodros’ policy towards Wollo was motivated by the weakening of dynasties of the region in order to facilitate his program of reunification. As a result, by the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a significant reduction in the power of the Wollo ruling dynasties.

Tewodros’ campaigns to Wollo

With the aim of integrating the province, Tewodros made repeated aggressive campaigns towards Wollo. In his own words Tewodros underlined his campaign of to Wollo was “a

⁶¹ Zeneb (Ed. Enno Litmann, *The Chronicler of King Theodore of Abyssinia*. Princeton, 1902, pp. 3-5; Seven Rubenson, *The survival of Ethiopian independence*, London : Heinemann, 1976, p.13

⁶² Brian J. Yates, “Invisible Actors: The Oromo And The Creation Of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1913), PhD Dissertation: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009, p.44

campaign to crush the infidels, Muslims and the *Galla*” i.e. to remove those dynasties who had Oromo and Islam backgrounds.⁶³

Earlier in 1853, he defeated Ras Ali II, the last ruler of the *Wereseh* and brought an end to the Yejju dynasty, which had dominated Ethiopia during the *Zemene Mesafint* as guardian of the Gonderine Emperors. The defeat of Ras Ali at the battle of Ayshal marked the end of *Zemene Mesafint*.⁶⁴

After crowned as Emperor in 1855, Tewodros made about five campaigns in Wollo. The first was made a few weeks after his coronation. Despite their resistance, the Wolloyes were defeated, and several the leading men of the region were taken prisoners. However, as was the case in other parts of the empire, a serious of revolts was to break out later. Thus, Tewodros made multiple campaigns to pacify the Wollo country.⁶⁵ He made a second campaign in 1857. Plowden reported that for the most year of 1857, Tewodros was in Wara Himano with fire and sword. As the resistance escalated, Tewodros had to spend more time and crowd to crush it. In 1858 Tewodros led a campaign to Wollo for the third time to put down a rebellion led by a powerful contender for the overlordship of Wollo, Amade Bashir. In 1860 Tewodros was once again in Wolllo for the fourth time. Yet, and again in 1862/63 for the fifth and last of his campaigns.⁶⁶

⁶³ Henry A Stern, *The Captive missionary*, p. 211; Brian J. Yates, *Invisible Actors . . .*, p.132

⁶⁴ Richard A. Caulk, “Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1972), p. 610; Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie I University, 1966, p. 43

⁶⁵ Kofi Darkwah, “Emperor Theodore II and the Kingdom of Shoa 1855-1865”. *Journal of African History*, Vol. X, No. I, 1969. p.105

⁶⁶ Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Ninetenth century Wollo*, p.162-164

As compared to other provinces, it was towards Wollo that the Emperor made repeated campaigns. While he has got control of other provinces mostly in a single campaign, Tewodros had to spend more time and energy to crush the stiff resistance he met in Wollo.

What differs in the campaign to Wollo

From the beginning, Tewodros' treatment of Wollo differed from his treatment of other provinces; Tigray, Gonder, Gojjam and Shewa. I argue that the Emperor's campaign to Wollo was different from his campaign to other regions of the Empire. It is because that the campaign to Wollo was not only to break the power of regional nobility as was done in other regions but also to bring an end to those ruling dynasties of the region.⁶⁷

Tewodros made public that his intention in Wollo was to end the *Galla* power once and for all, suppress Islam, and above all reunite Ethiopia as a Christian empire. Thus, he broke the ascendancy of the Wollo ruling dynasties: the *Wereseh* and *Mammedoch*.⁶⁸ Thus, the campaign to Wollo was more than political incorporation.

Hussien asserts that this campaign of the Emperor to Wollo had weakened and neutralized Islam, which was identified as a basis of regional political and cultural identity. Some secondary sources signpost that Tewodros had the aim to convert Muslims to Christianity.⁶⁹ But there is no evidence of conversion of Muslims under Tewodros. The available written and oral sources equally emphasized that Tewodros did not impose and enforce a policy of religious coercion and

⁶⁷ Donald Crummey, *The Violence of Tewodros* . . . , p.111

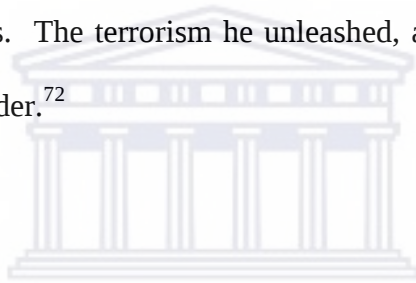
⁶⁸ Mordechai Abir. *The Era of Princes: The Challenge of Islam; The Reunification of The Christian Empire 1769-1855*(Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1968, p. 142; R. A. Caulk, *Firearms and Princely Power* . . . , p. 610

⁶⁹ A. H. M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *A History of Abyssinia*, The Clarendon Press, 1935, p.131; Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo*. . . , p.163

conversion. He only attempted to “push back the political position of Islam” and did not seriously try to convert people to Christianity.⁷⁰

By and large, the motive of Tewodros’ campaigns into Wollo was territorial unification than religious conversion. As Rubenson suggested, Tewodros’s policy towards the Wollo rulers and Islam was “a Political and dynastic question rather than a religious one.”⁷¹

Crummey pointed out that Tewodros’ policy towards Wollo was also diverse from other rebellious provinces such as Tigray, Gojjam, and Shewa, in the severity of the measures he took to put down the Wollo uprisings. The terrorism he unleashed, and the ruthless devastation his troops caused in Wollo was broader.⁷²



The Resistance of the Wolloyes and Tewodros’s Reaction

The campaign of Tewodros to Wollo was strongly resisted by the different leaders of the province one after another. The nobility of Wollo did not sit idly by when Tewodros committed his most atrocities in the province. They continued to offer considerable resistance to this process of centralization throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Regarding this, Hussien wrote:

The leaders of the rebellions perceived Tewodros’s objectives and activities as being aimed not only at their destruction as a ruling class but also at undermining

⁷⁰ Habtamu Mengistie, *Land Tenure*. . . , p.243

⁷¹ Seven Rubenson, *The survival of Ethiopian independence*, p.164

⁷² Crummey, *The Violence of Tewodros*. . . , p. 68

the social, economic and cultural foundation of the Muslim communities themselves. Thus, the Wollo chiefs were determined to keep their province to themselves.⁷³

Among the Wollo ruling elites who strongly resisted Tewodros's campaign in Wollo was Warqit, the *Mammedoch* queen, and the regent to her son Amade Ali, the legal heir of Imam Ali. While Tewodros was on his way to Wollo in 1855, Worqit is said to have created an alliance with Haile-Melekot of Shewa to fight the Emperor when he reached in central Wollo.

When the Emperor reached a place called Ginba in central Wollo, Worqit surrounded him with numerous cavalry and men. According to Wolde Mariam, this was the greatest face to face resistance that Tewodros encountered in Wollo. In the end, Tewodros was able to defeat Worqit who left the battlefield and fled with her troops.⁷⁴

The other Wollo noble who is known for resisting Tewodros is Amade Beshir. By 1858, the Wollo's were brought to some form of united struggle under Amade Beshir. Oral traditions affirm that Amade Beshir proved to be a hero of Wollo. According to Plowden, in Wore Himeno a large Wollo force under a chief. According to Plowden's report, Amade Bashir had about 50,000 cavalries under his command and was determined to assert provincial independence. As the rebellion of Amade continued, the emperor had to stay in Wollo for a whole year until October 1859.⁷⁵

⁷³ Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo*. . . , p. 166

⁷⁴ Wolde Mariam (Aleqa), *The History of Emperor Tewodros* IES MS No. 91 p.7

Having defeated Worqit, the nominal ruler of Wollo, Tewodros appointed Liben Amade, from one of the rival ruling factions of the Mamedoch ruling family

⁷⁵ Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo*. . . , p.164-166. When the resistance grew, the emperor concentrated all his attention and force in Wollo and even shifted his center from Debre Tabor to Maqdala, in Wollo.



THE QUEEN OF THE GALLA COUNTRY,
WITH HER YOUNGEST SON AND A MAHOMETAN PRIEST.

Figure 5 Warqit, the Mammadoch Queen. (Photo from Henry Stern)

Tewodros' campaign in Wollo was cruel. In response to their resistance, Tewodros ruthlessly punished the Wolloyes and imprisoned the ruling members.⁷⁶ Zeneb's chronicle and the other contemporary writer Aleqa Wolde Maryam describe Tewodros' atrocities committed against Wollo to gain control of this region. Wolde Mariam records that during the process of this battle, the Emperor cut off the two hands of each prisoner, tied them to the prisoner's neck and let all the prisoners go back to the Wollo ranks. On several occasions the Emperor had the hands and feet of prisoners amputated and then sent his victims back to their families. Due to such actions, a feeling of anxiety and terror created among the people of Wollo. It is reported that in a certain locality, people who saw a man whose legs and hands amputated said "for his meal, his wife may feed him. How he could sanitize in the toilet."⁷⁷

In addition to the imprisonment and physical punishments, the Emperor's reaction to the Wollo opposition includes death penalty. The European traveler who was imprisoned by Tewodros at Maqdela, Henry Blanc, saw many Wolloyes killed. Tewodros' reaction in Wollo and the murder was directed not only to the Muslims but also towards Christians who stood against his policy of consolidation. Stern witnessed his observation that "Not satisfied with the blood that had already flowed, he ordered the execution of all the Christian prisoners". Looking after the killing, a certain priest, denounced the Emperor, "You have executed the 'Gallas' because they and their tribes are your enemies; but what reason can you alleged for the butchery of a mass of people,

⁷⁶ Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974*. London : James Currey, 199, p.30; Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia* . . . , p.106; Donald Crummey, *The Violence of Tewodros* . . . ,p.111; Informant: Ato Asmamaw Hayle.

⁷⁷ Wolde Mariam, MS No. 91, p.8; Donald Crummey, *The Violence of Téwodros* . . p.111; Donald Crummey, "Orthodoxy And Imperial Reconstruction In Ethiopia 1854—1878", *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, Vol. 29, No. 2 (OCTOBER 1978), pp. 427-442

whose only misfortune is that you are strong and they weak; you the master and they slaves; you free and they captives?”⁷⁸ Thus, his aim towards Wollo was purely political than religious.

In connection with Tewodros’ atrocities in Wollo, Wollo tradition has it that the Ginba fields saw a great many of their ancestor’s untold deaths.⁷⁹

Tewodros’ reaction to the Wollo resistance includes material destruction. When he marched to Wollo at the head of his thousands, he ransacked the land in anger. His revengefully burnt villages far and wide wherever he was opposed. He scorched the lands of rebels and enslaved the followers of rebel leaders. The vulnerable peasants were forced to flee in order to save their lives. The situation resulted in a serious famine to happen in the region.⁸⁰

Regarding the brutality of Tewodros’ campaign in Wollo Donald Crummey suggested “in Wollo, from the beginning, his policy was one of greater severity, although it was not without its subtlety and flexibility. From the accounts of the first Wollo campaign of mid- 1855 come the first reports of terrorism; both by the mutilations of prisoners of war and by the destruction of property.”⁸¹

Finally, the Wolloyes were defeated and handed over to Tewodros’s consolidation policy. To borrow the words of Stern, they were “wakened, but not exhausted; prostrated, but not destroyed;

⁷⁸ Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia* . . . , p.106; Henry Stern, *The Captive Missionary* . . . , p. 221; Brian J. Yates, “Invisible Actors. . . , p.134

⁷⁹ Oral Informants: Kebede Wolde Semayat and Girma Abiy

⁸⁰ Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo*. . . , p.163; Henry Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia* . . . , p. 143; Carmichael, Tim. “Approaching Ethiopian history: Addis Ababa and local governance in Harar, c. 1900 to 1950” *PhD Dissertations*, Michigan University, 2001, p.22

⁸¹ Donald Crummey, *The Violence of Tewodros* . . . , p.111

defeated, but not vanquished.”⁸² The political and religious consolidation continued under Emperor Yohannes IV.

4.2 Political and Religious Consolidation under Emperor Yohannes IV

“... Until Gragn came and destroyed it, you know that Wollo was a Christian land. . .”

“While Tigray, Shewa, Gonder and Gojjam remained in the belief of Christ, Wollo stayed in a dark period, in the Mohammedan belief. Let us Christianize Wollo: its leaders and the people”

Emperor Yohannes

During *Zemene Mesafint*, various divisions were created in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church over doctrinal issues especially on the nature of Christ. Regional lords, ambitious to hold more power, are said to have aggravated the division by allying themselves with a religious faction which were dominant in the region. These divisions hindered the unity of the church for over a century.⁸³

Yohannes, the emperor who had religion central to his identity and that of his country, considered this division as a major obstacle for the process of consolidating his imperial power. He believed that for an effective political reunification of the empire, a unity in the Ethiopian

⁸² Henry Stern, *the Captive Missionary*. . . , p. 213

⁸³ Gebre Madhin Kidane. “Yohannis IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policy.” B.A. Thesis, Department of History, Haile Selassie I University, (1972), p. 12; Mordechai Abir, *The Era of Princes*. . . , p.xxiv; Zewude Gebre-Selassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A political biography*, (Oxford Clarendon press, 1975), p.94, The divisions are said to have created since the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries in the country in the seventeenth century.

Orthodox Church should first be created.⁸⁴ Moreover, Yohannes' religious policy was also in reaction to the expansion of Egypt in Mereb Melash region and the Red Sea coast.

In his letter Yohannes wrote to Queen Victoria, seeking her support against Muslim incursions, he explained his fright that might come from them, especially Egypt. Yohannes told Victoria: "I have no strong and truthful friend whom I trust other than you. And I am saying all this because I know you are the protector of Christians. And now looking what the Moslems are doing. They want to change Ethiopia, the Christian country into Islam and to introduce slavery. All this is not my wish."⁸⁵

In such cases, Emperor Yohannes considered Muslims in Ethiopia as one obstacle for his policy of political unification and centralization. Besides, he feared that the Muslims in Ethiopia, particularly those of Wollo might cooperate with the neighbouring Muslim states mainly with Egypt and Sudan against his kingdom. Thus, he managed to unite his people behind him in resisting the incursions of Muslim Egypt.⁸⁶

Yohannes' policy towards Wollo

Ethiopian rulers, especially Yohannes, regarded the Islamization of Wollo as the loss of territory to the Muslim Oromo. The chronicle of Emperor Yohannes reflected that the presence of the

⁸⁴ Zewude Gebre-Selassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia* . . . , p. 94; Hussien Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo* . . . , p. 167. Hussie also suggests that two of the most outstanding emperors of the period, Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, perceived Islam, especially Islam in Wollo, as an internal source of a direct challenge to their policy of unification.

⁸⁵ F.O 95/728, Yohannes to Victoria, 9 April 1883

⁸⁶ Emeshaw Worke, "Memher Akale-Wold and Boru-Meda Debre Berhane Selassie Church, 1883-1874," MA Thesis (Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 2010), p.5; Tim Carmichael, *Approaching Ethiopian history* . . . , p. 25; Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. London: Frank Cass and Co, Ltd., 1965, p.122; Richard A. Caulk, "Firearms and Princely Power . . . , p. 23

Muslim *Galla* in Wollo was a threat to the Ethiopian nation “due to their non-Christian belief and uncivilized culture”. Emperor Yohannes believed that the *Galla* occupied region, Wollo, was Islamized by the sword of Ahmed Gragn and wanted it to return to Christianity.

As a result, Yohannes declared:

*Until Gragn came and destroyed it, you know that Wollo was a Christian land. . .
Ahmed Gragn killed and slaughtered the Christian population. He shed the blood
of Christian and burnt the churches. Those believers who escaped from death, he
caused them to leave their homes and to go to exile to the wildness.*⁸⁷

While the Emperor was on a campaign at Azebo, northern Wollo, which was formerly a Christian settled area, he avowed his ambition to Christianize the area. The Chronicler writes

*This land of Azebo was formerly a holy country for a long time, and many
churches were erected in it. In churches were many priests and deacons, men and
women, old and young. After a long time the Galla prevailed and killed them with
blades sparing none for killing a soul is bravery in their view. After the
extermination of the children of baptism, they burnt down churches and set up
idol temples.*⁸⁸

Yohannes made these backgrounds as a justification for his activity in Wollo. He believed that Islam in Wollo had developed on the land which had been Ethiopian Christian territory ever since the late Aksumite period.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Bairu Tafla (ed), A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889), Wiesbaden : Steiner, 1977. P, 145; Gebra-Medihn Kidane, Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policies. . . , p.28

⁸⁸ Bairu Tafla, A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV . . . , p. 145

⁸⁹ Gebra-Medihn Kidane, Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policies. . . , p.39

It seems that Yohannes was tempered by the destruction of Christianity in Wollo during Ahmed Gragn. . . And it also seems that he wanted to redress and even avenge the destruction by Gragn. As Atsme mentioned, Yohannes declared “I shall avenge the blood of Ethiopia. Gran Islamized Ethiopia by force, fire and the word.”⁹⁰ Thus, Yohannes directed to reintroduce Christianity to the territories settled by the people of Raya, Azabo, Yajju and the whole Wollo and to unify the Ethiopian highlands by subduing Muslims and Oromo Wollo.

The Council of Borumeda

Within such circumstances, in May 1878 Yohannes called a religious conference at Boru Meda, near the town of Dessie.⁹¹ The motive of the council was to bring an end to the controversy within the church and create religious uniformity in the country and to conclude the issue of the Wollo Muslims. The council was designed to settle doctrinal conflicts in the Christian areas by designating one national religious sect of Christianity for all the population to follow. This edict included Muslims, members of the Jewish faith, traditionalist and adherents of other dominations of Christianity.⁹²

A hot debate was made between the representatives of the different sects especially between *Hulat Ledat* (Two Births) and *Sost Ledat* (Three Births) adherents.⁹³ Finally, it was decided to establish only one Ethiopian Orthodox doctrine i.e. the *Hulat Ledat* (Tewahedo) doctrine.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Atsme Giorgis, *Ye ‘Galla’ Tarik* [The History of *Galla*], institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS No. 468 p. 96

⁹¹ Emeshaw Worke, “*Memher Akale-Wold and Boru-Meda*. . . , p.5; Richard A. Caulk, “Firearms and Princely Power . . . , p. 23; Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.122.

⁹² Brian j Yates, *Invisible Actors*. . . , p.142

⁹³ *Hulat Ledat* (*Tewahedo*) states that Jesus became a perfect man and a perfect God. The doctrine believes in the unity of the divine and human nature of Christ. *Sost Ledat* (*Ye Tsega Lij*) states three births - eternal birth of the Son from the Father; genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary, and birth from the Holy Spirit during baptism. The

The council of Boru Meda marked a major step in the reconstruction of the Ethiopian Empire. It accomplished dual goals; it politically and religiously unified the state. By bringing an end to the age-old divisions in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and ensuring religious uniformity, the Council of Boru Meda paved the way for the religious and political consolidation of the Empire generally and Wollo particularly.⁹⁵

At the end of the council, it was declared that all Muslims should be converted to Christianity or leave his country. To make the policy effective, Muslim officials were given three months to renounce their religion, and the rest of the populations were given three years to change their religion to Christianity.⁹⁶

Gebre-Sellassie, the chronicler of Menelik, who personally attended the council reported that sometimes after the council, Emperor Yohannes announced to the Wollo Muslims:

. . . Through his mercy, if God united us with his love, we are your apostles. Until Gragn came and destroyed it, you know that Wollo was a Christian land. Now you Muslims . . . believe in the name of Christ and get baptized. If you become Christians and do good things, you will govern this world and later inherit the Kingdom of God.⁹⁷

doctrine believes that Jesus became a God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Jordan River and not upon the incarnation. Hulet Ledet states the first two births (*Tewahedo*) i.e the eternal birth of the Son from the Father and the genetic birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary.

⁹⁴ Emeshaw Worke, *Memher Akale-Wold and Boru-Meda*. . . , p.6; Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.122; Informant: *Memher Hayla-Maryam*.

⁹⁵ Donald Crummey, *Orthodoxy And Imperial Reconstruction* . . . , p, 441

⁹⁶ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek Neguse Negest ZeItyopeya*” [The History of the time of Menelik King of Kings of Ethiopia] (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 E.C), p.93; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 58.

⁹⁷ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek*, p.92.

Thus, Wollo became the first theatre of conversion. The central focus of the Emperor was on Wollo than other provinces of the Empire. According to Asme's account, after the council, Yohannes personally stayed in Wollo to implement of his policy of Christianization.⁹⁸ He doesn't go and stay to any other province except in Wollo.

There were different factors for Yohannes to give serious attention to Wollo and insist upon the total extermination of Islam in the province. First, the Wollo Muslims were a formidable force in nineteenth century Ethiopia. If they remain Muslim and independent, they might be an obstacle to his aim of political and religious consolidation. Secondly, as explained above, he feared that the Muslims of Wollo might cooperate with the neighbouring Muslim states mainly with Egypt and Sudan against his kingdom. Thirdly, as Wollo was/is closer to his home province of Tigray, it also held strategic value because of its position. Due to its geographic centrality, Wollo possessed a key emphasis in Yohannes' national political and religious consolidation.⁹⁹

For that matter, the king saw his campaign to Wollo as more than a means of bringing the province under central control because he used conversion as the primary justification for his campaign.¹⁰⁰

In order to facilitate the Christianization of the Wollo, the Emperor took two different measures. First, he appointed teachers for unbeliever communities who teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Especially, he appointed the foremost scholar of the Orthodox Church, Memher Akalewold, as apostle over Wollo.¹⁰¹ The Emperor assigned Mamher Akale Wold to teach and baptize the

⁹⁸ Zewde Gebre-Selassie, Yohannes IV. . . , p.84; Gebra-Medihn Kidane, Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policies. . . , p.41; Atsme Giorgis, Ye 'Galla' Tarik, p. 96

⁹⁹ Carmichael, Tim. "Approaching Ethiopian history . . . , p. 25; Zewde Gebre Selassie, Yohaannes IV, p.84

¹⁰⁰ Habtamu, Land Tenure. . . , p.243

¹⁰¹ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek*. . . , pp. 151 and 158; Gebere Medihn, Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policies. . . p.44

people of Wollo. He spoke to Mamher Akale Wold “While Tigray, Shewa, Gonder and Gojjam remained in the belief of Christ, Wollo stayed in a dark period, in the Mohammedan belief. Let us Christianize Wollo: its leaders and the people.” Due to its domination by Islamic belief, Yohannes measured Wollo as a dark province. Thus, the Emperor advised the Mamher, “ወሎን አደራ ስጥኹዎታለሁ ጠንክረዉ ያስተምሩ” which literally mean “I entrust Wollo to you; be strong in your teaching”.¹⁰²

The second measure Emperor Yohannes took as a means of expanding Christianity and as a remedy for Islamic destruction was the Church construction of churches. In different parts of the province, new churches were built, and old ones renovated. The emperor ordered his officials to build churches in Zobil to substitute the churches that had been burnt down during the ear of Imam Ahmed Gragh. He said “All you high princes and honourable officials who bear titles and hold power in my kingdom construct and finish churches within three years starting from today, leaving out none of those that existed in the past. The Emperor himself built a church dedicated to the Trinity at Boruméda.¹⁰³

Conversion

¹⁰² Emeshaw Worke, “*Memher Akale-Wold and Boru-Meda*, p.16

Memher Akalewold has a smooth relationship with contemporary Ethiopian leaders. He was one of their senior advisors on religious matters during the periods of Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik. Respectful religious knowledge, Emperor Tewodros compared the caliber of Memher Akalewold with his most trusted and distinguished army commander, *Fitawurari*, Gebrye . . . ይማሯል እንደ አካልዬ ይዋጓል እንደ ገብርኤ (lit. mean “If you learn excel like AkaleWold; if you fight shine like Gebrye) (Yohannes Afewerk (Esdros), *Ye Memher Akale-Wold Serse-Wold Tarikna Qenéwochachewu*. [The Biography of Mamher Akala-Wald and his poems}, (Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University Press, 2002EC, p. 33; Emeshaw, p. 23)

¹⁰³ Aleqa Lelem, *The History of Kings Tekle-Giorgis and Yohannes*, IES MS 1763; R.A Caulk, *Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia* . . . , p. 250

Following the council of Boru Meda, the mass conversion of the Wollo Muslims was carried out. The two big chiefs of Wollo, Mohammed Ali and Aba Watewu were baptized. Mohammed Ali was renamed Mikael with the title of *Ras*. The Emperor became his godfather. Likewise, *Abba* Waṭew was also baptized and given the name Haile-Mariam with the title of *Dejazmach*.¹⁰⁴

With regard to the Wollo Muslims, while some of them converted to Christianity by taking their leader as models, some of them resisted Christianity and continued to practice Islam. As a result, the rulers began to forcefully baptize the Muslims of Wollo. As written and oral sources shown, within two years, from 1878 to 1880, some 50,000 Muslims, 20,000 pagans, and half a million *Galla* were said to have baptized. They were baptized in masses and given Christian names.¹⁰⁵

There was no unanimous response of the Muslim communities of Wollo to the religious policy of the Emperor. As indicated earlier, in some cases, the local political leaders remained on power by accepting Christianity. Some others showed outward acceptance of Christianity. They worshipped the Christian God during the day and the Muslim Allah during the night. Some of them went to the mosques or to the houses of the sheikhs at night to avoid this enforced baptism

Those who opposed the conversion were forced to exile to different parts of Ethiopia, to Gurage, Arusi and Jimma and even beyond to the neighbouring Sudan. Some of them had resisted by

¹⁰⁴ Chris P Rosenfeld, *A Chronology of Menelik II of Ethiopia*. African Studies Centre, Michigan State University, 1976, p.80; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek*”, p.93

¹⁰⁵ Spencer J. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.123; Gebre Medihn, *Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policies*. . . p.46

organizing rebellions which forced Yohannes and his vassals to launch several campaigns in order to suppress them.¹⁰⁶

The Resistance of the Wollo Muslims and Yohannes' Reaction

Between the years 1878 and 1885, some Muslim communities of Wollo resisted the conversion by declaring a jihad at different times. The response to Yohannes' decree of conversion differed from place to place and from time to time. It was weakest in Wore Himano and naturally, the coercive measures taken there were also less serious. In other places, however, the people resisted conversion. They killed priests sent to baptize them and tried to prevent the construction of churches in their respective localities, such as in Boru, Ambasel, Dessie and Qallu area.¹⁰⁷

In places where resistance was firm, Muslim clerics played a key role in organizing and spreading the protests in Wollo. Some of the most renowned Muslim clerics, who mobilized and organized the Muslims against Emperor Yohannes' religious policy in different parts of Wollo were Sheikh Ali Adem in Wahelo, Sheikh Seid Bushira and Tolha Jaffar in Qallu, Sheikh Ali of Gerado, Sheikh Adem Yajarsa in Borena and Sheikh Hussien Jibril of Wara-Himeno. Sheikh Hussien Jibril was a renowned poet and speaker of prophecy. He strongly resisted the Emperor's

¹⁰⁶ Hussein Ahmed, "The Dynamism of Religious Conversion in the History of Ethiopia: Some Reflections". *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2 (Summer/Fall 2005-2006). p. 202

¹⁰⁷ Asnake Ali. *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo*. . . , p.25

policy. He instigated mass mobilization of Wollo Muslims against forceful conversion by declaring a *jihad* at different times.¹⁰⁸

Yohannes' response to the people's resistance to conversion was severe. Many of those who resisted were tortured, imprisoned, banished and killed. In order to suppress Muslim uprisings, the Emperor launched serious campaigns against the rebels in different parts of Wollo, particularly in Yejjju, Qobo, Qallu, Tehuledere and Werebabo. He ordered *Negus* Menilek and *Ras* Mikaél to take part in his campaign to Qallu to suppress the uprisings. In this campaign, which was led by the Emperor himself, the rebels were harshly beaten. In the fighting, many Muslims including their leaders such as Sheikh Muhammed Basher and Sheikh Ahmed Din were killed.¹⁰⁹

Afterward, Wollo transformed from Muslim dynastic domination to Christian imperial rule. This situation paved the way for the integration of Wollo with the rest of the empire in the years following the council. Due to the political and religious consolidation by the two emperors, the political importance of Islam in Wollo came to an end and a partially Christianized population had developed.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Asnake Ali. Aspects of the Political History of Wollo. . . , p. 28; IES MS, Ye Dessie Ketema, p. 51; Emeshaw Worke, "*Memher* Akale-Wold and Boru-Meda. . . , p.18

¹⁰⁹ Richard A Caulk, "Religion and the State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1972, pp. 34-35); Hussien Ahmed, Islam in Nineteenth century Wollo. . . , p.174; Informants: Ato Jemal Mohammed and Ato Tekle Wolde-Giorgis.

Memher Akale-Wold is said to have advised the emperor not to mobilize forces to forcefully convert the Muslims to Christianity. He counselled him to carry out his evangelization through preaching. He believed that the underlying principle should have been "ከመጠምጠም መማር ይቅደም" "Education should precede the turban." He further argues that if the newly converted individuals were not given basic religious education, they would turn back to their former faith. (Emeshaw, p.28)

¹¹⁰ Habtamu, Land Tenure. . . , 245

Some writers and informants considered the two periods of conversions, by Ahmed Gagn and Emperor Yohannes, as crucial periods in the socio-political history of Wollo province.¹¹¹ In the first period of conversion, many people were converted from Christianity to Islam and in the second period, many Muslims were converted to Christianity.

Reverse to this imposing conversion history of the province, the people lived in an amazing harmony. I assume that this is because the conversions were the agendas of the ruling elite for their political agendas. The people of both religions were not in a conflict despite the imposing conversion activities of their rulers. Thus, the result of the above policy was certainly religious and cultural integration for greater peace and political unity. Regarding with this the eminent professor of Ethiopian history, Bahru Zewde suggests that the above situation gradually paved the way to the development of “unique juxtaposition of Islam and Christianity” which still exists in the region.¹¹²

To conclude, in the recordings of eighteenth and nineteenth century Ethiopia, the place given to Wollo and its ruling families is somewhat prejudiced. It was because of their ethnic and religious backgrounds as Muslim Oromos.¹¹³ The Wollo ruling dynasties were regarded as usurpers though they played a great role in the socio-political life of the province. Mainly it was due to the legend of Solomonic line, a historical tool of legitimation to come to the throne of

¹¹¹ Hussein Ahmed, *The Dynamism of Religious Conversion . . .*, p.201

¹¹² Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia . . .*, p.49

¹¹³ Indeed, as oral sources and informants say, the discrimination had more of a religious feature than ethnic. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the term *Galla* has a religious context than an ethnic. It was a collective name given to the unbelievers/unbaptized. In relation to this, Teshale Tibebu mentioned “Amhara is a term of religious interference, not of ethnicity. Hence when people identify themselves as “Amhara” they mean Christian. The term *Galla* is understood as meaning “pagan”, not an ethnic name.” (Teshale Tibebu, “The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896 - 1974”, Red Sea Press Inc. 1995, p. 178)

Ethiopia. According to *Kibre Negest*,¹¹⁴ the Imperial House of Ethiopia, also known as the Solomonic dynasty, originated from king Solomon of Israel. According to this tradition, it was only those royal people who had Solomonic blood that could possess political power. Others are not allowed to come to power. Similarly, the Muslim Oromo nobility of Wollo were viewed as the “destroyer of Christianity and Civilization”. Even those some leaders of the *Weresheikh* converted to Christianity, they were never accepted as legitimate leaders. Their Christianity was never accepted as genuine.¹¹⁵ Abir explained the situation saying “In imperial Ethiopia it was easier for non-Christians, to pass through the eye of a needle than to enter the charmed circle of power and privilege”¹¹⁶

Thus, Tewodros and Yohannes have given special emphasis to Wollo province in their policy of political and religious consolidation during the second half of the nineteenth century. As they declared their motives towards Wollo was to “end the *Galla* power and to suppress Islam”

It was these situations that led to the reduction in power, weakening and disintegration of Wollo dynasties and its marginalization in the nineteenth century historiography of Ethiopia.

In the following decades after the political and religious consolidation, Wollo has got a chance to strengthen as a regional power under its leader Imam Mohamed Ali, the later Ras/Negus Mikael, who united the different localities of Wollo under a central administration.

¹¹⁴ Wallis Budge, (Ed.) *Kebra Nagast (The Glory of Kings)*. Cambridge: Otario, 2000, pp. 28 – 37

The *Kebra Nagast*, or *The Glory of the Kings*, is a 14th-century account written in Ge'ez of the origins of the Solomonic line of the Emperors of Ethiopia. In it, Queen of Sheba of Ethiopia is said to have visited King Solomon in Jerusalem, seduced by the king and returned pregnant. Her son by king Solomon of Israel, Menelik, ascended the throne of his mother as Emperor Menelik I, King of Kings of Ethiopia. The dynasty he established ruled the country until the revolution of 1974. All the Emperors of Ethiopia claim descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Imperial throne had been belong to those who had made a claim of descent from the Solomonic blood.

¹¹⁵ Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia . . .*, p. 17

¹¹⁶ Mordechai Abir, *The Era of Princes. . .*, p. 274

Chapter Five

Wollo under Ras/Negus Mikael

Introduction

The last quarter of the nineteenth century is a time when the socio-economic and political conditions of Wollo province had been shaped. Many notables, leaders, and members of society contributed their own valuable contribution in the shaping process. One of these was the father of the designated Emperor, *Lij* Iyasu, the grandfather of Empress Menen (the wife of Emperor Haile-Sellassie), and the governor of Wollo province, *Ras* the later *Negus* Mikael. His conversion to Christianity and the strong relationship he established with Emperors Yohannes and Menilek paved the way for him to play a significant role in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century history of Wollo province.

After 1850s, Wollo was in a divided state into various smaller chieftains. *Ras* Mikael unified the divided districts of Wollo province under one centralized administration by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1886 *Ras* Mikael had become the sole ruler of Wollo recognized by Emperor Yohannes. In the following years, he executed the double task of centralizing Wollo under himself and integrating it with the rest of the Empire. Moreover, Mikael transformed Wollo from being a buffer zone to a political center. Mikael is even regarded as a “champion” who brought Wollo to its former glory and centrality.

The emergence of Wollo as a powerful regional force and its plea for the bigger national influence was later challenged by the Shewan aristocrats, the other strong ruling entity of early

twentieth century Ethiopia. This led to the Wollo-Shewa elite rivalry which characterized the country's history of the early twentieth century.

Thus, discussing this epoch generally and Mikael's period of rule specifically will have tremendous importance in briefly discussing the upcoming chapters – the Shewa/Wollo political rivalry that led to the fall of *Lij* Iyasu and the end of Wollo's ascendancy and its exclusion from the central Ethiopian politics.

5.1 Short biography of Ras/Negus Mikael

As discussed in chapter three, in the 1840s the *Mammadoch* ruling family was headed by *Imam* Ali *Abba* Bula. According to oral tradition, in the court of Ali *Abba* Bula there was a servant whose name was Gete. She is said to have come from Genda-Barat in western Shewa.¹ At this time Ali *Abba* Bula did not have children except a son. For the sake of solving his problem, a *wadaja*² ceremony was held at Ali *Abba* Bula's court. While Warqit, the formal wife of Ali ignored the participants of the *wadaja*, Gete, the housemaid served them effectively throughout the night by providing all the necessities.³ In response to her service, the Sheikh who led the ceremony is said to have blessed her and told a prophecy concerning the birth of a son from Gete. It reads as follows:

We have seen a boy from the maid

We named him Mohammed

¹ Gobaze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, (Addis Ababa, United Printers, 1996), p. 35, Oral Informants: Ato Tefera Melaku, Abba Yosef Gwangul and Haji Seid Hussien.

² As explained in the second chapter, *Wedaja* is a praying ceremony by a group of shaykhs which is made by chewing *chat*. It is customary practice in Wollo.

³ Informants: *Liqe-Tebebet* Sirak Melese and Ato Kebbete Rufe.

Who would violate the principles of the Prophet

We have seen a boy from a “*Galla*”

Full of cord on his neck⁴

The saying indicates that Ali *Abba* Bula would get a son from his housemaid. He would be named as Mohammed. He would stand against the religion of the prophet and even become a Christian. A year after the benediction was told, a son was born from *Imam* Ali *Abba* Bula and the house maid Gete. He was Mohammed Ali, the future *Ras/Negus* Mikael.⁵

Well known Ethiopian writer, Gobeze explained that Mikael was born in 1850. And this is confirmed by informants and independent sources. Marcus indicated that when Mohammed Ali was baptized as a Christian in 1878, he was thirty years old. An inscription written by Mohammed Ali (the later *Negus* Mikael) himself, and which is displayed on the wall of the church of Dessie Madhane-Alam indicates that he was born on February 5. It reads: “. . . I was born on the day of *Madhane-Alam* (Holy Savior) on the month of *Ter*. . .”⁶. According to the chronology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Madhane-Alam* is commemorated on the twenty-seventh day of every month. So the inscription clearly indicates that Mohammed Ali was born on *Ter* 27 E.C.⁷ (February 5). Thus, by taking into consideration the above written and oral sources, it can be concluded that he was born on February 5, 1850.

⁴ Asnake Ali. “Aspects of the Political History of Wallo: 1872-1916”. MA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1983, p.123; Informants: *Liye-Kahenat* Taye Tsegaw and *Ato* Kebede Rufe.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox church there is a tradition of putting a string on the neck of believers when they got baptized. It is served as a symbol of Christianity. One can distinguish Christians from Muslims simply by looking at the cord on his/her neck

⁵ Gobaze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*. . . , pp.35-6

⁶ Zewde Reta, *Teferi Mekonen, Reimu Ye Seletan Guzo Be Menilek Be Iyasuna Be Zewuditu Zemen 1884-1922*[Tefari Mekonnen The Long Political Journey during the reigns of Menelik, Iyasi and Zewuditu], (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1998), p.316; An Inscription, Dessie Däbrä Mädhānit Madhane-Alam church, 1912; Informants: *Abba* Yosef Guangul and *Ato* Kedir Ali.

⁷ Ethiopian Calendar



Figure 6 The stone inscription of the wall of the church of Dessie Medhane-Alem [Photograph taken by the researcher 07/03/2017]

Translation of the inscription reads as follows:

This church was destroyed by Gragn Ahmed during the reign of Emperor Libne Dingel. Since then to Emperor Menelik the number of kings is 23 and the lords nine. The total time was 423 years and nine months and 12 days. After this I, Ras Mikaél, constructed within 3 months, and with the will of God. Glory to the almighty God! The Ark Covenant is Mädhané-Aläm (Holy Savior). I and my son Lij Iyasu were born on the same day, Ter 27 on the day of Mädhané-Aläm.

Written on Miazya 30, 1905EC (8 May 1913)

For the first two and three years, Warqit was not aware of the identity of Mohammed Ali. When she knew who he was, immediately after the death of Ali *Abba* Bula, she feared that he would be a contender of her son Amade Ali for the position of their father. In order to avoid her fear it is said, she prepared a plan to poison and kill him.⁸

Being aware of this plan, and fearing the danger that might occur to her son, Gete moved out of Tanta⁹ and immigrated to Sayint. There, one of the chieftains of the area, Mare'ed Tabasa received and provided them with all their necessities. It is even said that Mare'ed married Gété. Due to this reason, Mohammed Ali spent his childhood in Sayint. He was brought up with Yazaw, the son of Mare'erd, who was later become one of the chief lieutenants in his future career.¹⁰

During his first campaign towards Wollo in 1855, Tewodros imprisoned members of the *Mammadoch* ruling family and other chiefs of the region at Maqdala.¹¹ Even though he was a small boy, Mohammed Ali is said to have been detained as he was a member of the *Mammadoch*. Oral tradition indicates that he was released following the pleading of his mother.¹²

⁸ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo: 1855-1908". B.A. Thesis. Department of History, Haile Selassie I University, (1972) p.13; Informants: *Ato* Asmammaw Hayle and *Mamere* Zena Wolde-Mikael.

⁹ By the time, Tanta was a place where the Mammedoch dynasty centered

¹⁰ Gobaze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, p.36; Informant: *Liqa-Kahenat* Taye Tsegaw.

¹¹ Henery Blanc, *A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia*. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868), p.106.

¹² Assefa Balcha, "The Court of Negus Mikael: An Analysis of Its Structure and a Description of the Role of 'Ayteyef' Hall", BA Thesis (Addis Ababa University: Department of History, 1984), p.3

There is a scarcity of written sources regarding his early life. Oral sources indicate that he spent his youth age in Sayint with his mother. He is said to have learnt the Quran as any Muslim youngster of the time. He completed the Quran and other Islamic educations which enabled him to get the title of *Imam*. Some sources indicated that he had taught the Quran in the Muslim area of Laga-Hida.¹³ But as Mohammed Ali was a fugitive who hides himself in Sayint from his contenders, it is hardly possible to conclude he taught the Quran in areas far away from Sayint.

The lack of clarity on his early years notwithstanding, it is known that when he turned seventeen, he claimed the title and position of his father, *Abba Bula Ali* and started his political career.¹⁴

Soon after the death of *Imam Abba Bula Ali*, his wife, Warqit took the leadership of the *Mammadoch* in the name of her son Amade Ali, the legal heir. But Emperor Tewodros removed Warqit from power because she was resisting his centralization efforts and appointed in her place, Liban Amade, the nephew of Abba Bula Ali. This action determined the shift of political power from the line of the family of *Abba Bula Ali* to that of Liban Amade. When Liban Amade died in 1857, Tewodros appointed Amade Liban, Liban's son, better known as *Abba Wataw*¹⁵ after the name of his horse, as administrator of Wollo. In 1865, Tewodros killed Warqit's son Amade Ali the legal heir to the *Mammadoch* dynasty while he was incarcerated at Maqdala.¹⁶

¹³ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo. . .", p.8; Informants: *Sheikh Hussien Ebrahim* and *Sajin Taye Tesemma*.

¹⁴ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo. . .", p.123; Informant *Sajin Taye Tesemma*. Informants explained as Mohammed Ali was educated at a place called Qalim in Saynt.

¹⁵ The meaning of Wataw is 'swallow'

¹⁶ When Thewodros in 1856 conquered Shewa, he captured Menelik and imprisoned him at the imperial court in Mäqdäla. In 1865 Menelik escaped from prison with the help of Queen Warqit. In retaliation, Tewodros killed her son.

The death of Amade Ali weakened the position of Warqit in the struggle for *Mammadoch* power because she lost the only legal basis from which to maintain *Mammadoch* sovereignty.¹⁷

It was at that time that Mohammed Ali went to the Wara-Himano area claiming the position of his father. According to oral tradition, *Abba* Wataw appointed him to govern the districts of Alada and Qola-Garado.¹⁸

Not satisfied with this post, Mohammed Ali started a rebellion against *Abba* Wataw and in 1867 he founded an opposition movement from Amora-Gadal in Wara-Himano. From there, he fought the first of his battles against the forces of *Abba* Wataw.¹⁹

In this fight between *Abba* Wataw and Mohammed Ali, most of the people of Wara-Himano appeared to support Mohammed Ali. This popular support is said to have originated partly from *Abba* Bula Ali's better personality and fame among the people of Wara-Himano. The people stirred Ali using popular verses, an example of which follows:

“አሞራ ገደል ላይ አንበሣ አሰፊ

እርሱ ቢበጥስ እኔም አብሬ”

A lion has been imprisoned at Amora-Gadal

If he breaks, I'll follow him

¹⁷Fekadu Begna, “A Tentative History of Wallo, pp. 12-15 Weld H. Blundel, (trans. & ed.), *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840 with Translations and Notes*. (Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.143; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek Neguse Negest ZeItyopeya*” [The History of the time of Menelik King of Kings of Ethiopia] (Addis Ababa: Artisti Printing Press, 1959 E.C), p.67

¹⁸ Asnake Ali. Aspects of the Political History of Wallo, p.9 This districts are located in Wara-Himano, Western part of Wallo

¹⁹ Asnake Ali. Aspects of the Political History of Wallo, pp. 10-11; Informants: *Ato* Samuel Mesganaw and *Liqe-Kahenat* Taye Tsegaw.

The verse depicts Mohammed Ali as a caged lion at Amora-Gadal, the place of his uprising. By implying that he was limited in governing a very small area, it encouraged him to break the shackle of influence on him. The verse also indicated that the people were ready to follow him if he rose against his overlord.

Moreover, the people of Wara-Himano showed their sympathy by giving shelter to Mohammed Ali whenever he was chased by *Abba Wataw*. But the support was passive and it was disorganized.²⁰

Mohammed Ali continued his struggle by moving from place to place in Wara-Himano. In 1868, he was able to recruit followers from the Wara-Himano and Sayint districts. His upbringing in Sayint helped him to recruit more followers and chief lieutenants from this area.²¹

While *Abba Wataw* under Tewodros' patronage had the upper hand in the struggle for power, Mohammed Ali was weak with no sponsor. Understanding the weakness of his position, he moved north to Saqoṭa in search of the support of Emperor Takla-Giorgis (r.1868-1871) and became his client.²²

The year 1868 was an appropriate time for *Abba Wataw* because by this time Mohammed Ali had moved to Saqota. The other contender for the *Mammadoch* leadership, Warqit, had died. The state of affairs created a favorable condition for *Abba Wataw* to hold political power albeit for a short period of time.²³

²⁰ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo p.12; Informants: *Ato Samuel Mesganaw* and *Ato Molla Yeshaw*.

²¹ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo, p.29; Informant: *Melake-Berhanat Gebre-Tsadik Asfaw*.

²² Richard A. Caulk, "Religion and the State in the nineteenth century Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol.X, No.1,1975, pp. 36- 37; Ye Dessie Ketema, MS, No.688, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated, p.44; Informant: *Ato Samuel Mesganaw*.

²³ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo, p.14; Informant: *Ato Molla Yeshaw*.

In the meantime, *Negus* Menelik of Shewa was expanding his frontier towards Wollo. Even though *Abba* Wataw tried to defend this expansion, he was defeated and captured by Menelik in 1871. Using this power vacuum as an advantage, the son of Mastayit, another *Mammadoch* queen, Ali Mastayit born from a non-*Mammadoch* father became the ruling *Imam* of Wollo.²⁴

While he was under the patronage of Takla-Giorgis, Mohammed Ali participated on the side of the Emperor on his decisive battle with Bazbez Kassa of Tigray. The victorious Kassa crowned himself Yohannes IV, Emperor of Ethiopia. He imprisoned Mohammed Ali,²⁵ but calculating the advantage he might get from returning Mohammed Ali to Wollo, Yohannes released and sent him back to Wollo with a certain chief *Dajazmach* Tasamma. The combined forces of Mohammed Ali and *Dajazmach* Tasamma entered the heartland of Wara-Himano, fought and defeated the newly installed *Imam*, Ali Mastayit at Tanta.²⁶

When Menelik heard about this, he released *Abba* Wataw and appointed him over Wollo. The rationale of Menelik to reappoint *Abba* Wataw was to use him as a counter-reaction against Mohammed Ali and Yohannes IV, who were gaining control of Wollo. This further worsened the power rivalry between the two *Mammadoch* princes: Mohammed Ali and *Abba* Wataw. In spite of his reappointment by Menelik, in 1873, *Abba* Wataw betrayed his overlord and declared

²⁴ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo, p.31; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek*, p.68 (Since he was from a non-*Mammadoch* father the people preferred to call him by the name of his mother).

²⁵ Alaga Lemlem, *Tarike Negest Ye Atse Tekle-Giorgis na Ye Atse Yohannes Tarik* [The History of Kings Tekle-Giorgis and Yohannes] MS, No.1763, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated and has not page numbers.

²⁶ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo, p.31; Informant: Ato Molla Yeshaw.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Emperor Yohannes had ambitions to control the region as part of his political and religious consolidation

himself an independent *Imam* of the *Mammadoch*. With the aim of eliminating his rival, Mohammed Ali, *Abba Wataw* went to Tanta area, fought and defeated him.²⁷

At this very time, Yohannes was busy in dealing with the Egyptian threat against the empire and was not in a position to assist Mohammed Ali. As a result, Mohammed Ali decided to ally himself with Menelik of Shewa. He must have calculated the proximity of Shewa for Wollo and the growing power of Menelik to have come to this decision. Menelik received him with great honor, and in 1874, recognized him as the sole ruler of Wollo. The allied forces of Mohammed Ali and Menelik fought against *Abba Wataw*, captured and imprisoned him at Inewari, in northern Shewa. With this achieved, they brought Wollo under their control. Finally, at a ceremony held at Wara-Ilu to celebrate their victory, in October 1876, Menelik formally declared Mohammed Ali *Imam* of Wollo incorporating the area from Wanchit to Bashilo, and from Abbay to Azalo.²⁸

However, the power rivalry of the two *Mammadoch* princes continued even after Mohammed Ali seized the position of the Imamate. Because when Mohammed plotted against him, Menelik released *Abba Wataw* and reappointed him over Wollo.²⁹ As explained in the previous topic, the rivalry of the two *Mammadoch* princes was inherited from their fathers. It was following the religious council of Boru-Meda, which going to be discussed later that the power struggle comes to an end.

²⁷ Asme Wolde-Giorgis, *Ye Galla Tarik*. [The History of Galla] MS, No.468, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated, p.40; Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo p.32; Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw.

²⁸ Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.35; Chris P Rosenfelled, *A Chronology of Menelik II of Ethiopia*. African Studies Centre: Michigan State University, 1976, p.59; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek, p.70; Chris Prouty Rosenfelled, *A Chronology of Menelik II of Ethiopia 1844-1913*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University., 1976), p.69

²⁹ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek, pp.78-79

From *Imam* Mohammed to Ras Mikael

In the previous chapter it is discussed that following the declaration of religious uniformity policy at the council of Boru-Meda, the two great chiefs of Wollo, Mohammed Ali and *Abba* Watawu were baptized. According to contemporary writers and informants, *Imam* Mohammed Ali accepted Christianity willingly. I argue that his birth from a Christian mother and his upbringing in Sayint, a Christian dominated district, might influence Mohammed Ali to accept Christianity. He was renamed Mikael (lit. Michael the Archangel) and given the royal title *Ras*. The Emperor, Yohannes, became his godfather.³⁰ He was renamed Mikael because the baptism took place on the twelfth of *Sene* (19 June), the day of the commemoration of the archangel Mikael according to the chronology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The conversion of Mohammed Ali to Christianity brought about various influences both in his private life and in the political atmosphere of Wollo. It is due to his conversion that he was promoted to a higher position and remained on power over Wollo. Moreover, when Wollo was transformed from Muslim dynastical domination to Christian Imperial rule following the conversion of its rulers, the rivalry between the *Mammedoch* elites came to an end. In their new religious personae they became collaborators of Emperor Yohannes and *Negus* Menelik³¹

In spite of his conversion to Christianity in search of appointment, *Ras* Mikael later becomes a devoted, a deeply devout, Orthodox Christian. His attachment to the new religion was strong. He devoted his time to religious activities expected from a devoted Christian such as praying,

³⁰ Misganaw Tadesse. *The Life and Contributions of Negus Mikael of Wollo*, MA Thesis, Bahir Dar University: Department of History: (2012), p. 19; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, *Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek . . .*, p.93 This occasion (the baptism) took place at the church of Golbo Mikael near Boru-Meda.

³¹ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo. . .", p.20; Ye Dessie Ketema, p.7; Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw

fasting, giving alms and building churches. A manuscript at the church of Tanta Michael explains:

“... እስመ ወእቱ ይሁብ ምጽዋተ ለነዳያን ወለምስኪናን ወያለብስ ለእሩቃን እመፍቅድሙ ወይጸመድ ለእግዚአብሔር መዓልተ ወሌሊተ በጾም ወበጸሎት ወሰጊድ ወብዙኃ ያፈቅሮ ለቅዱስ ሚካኤል ሊቀ መላዕክት ወይገብር ተዝካሮ ለቅዱስ ሚካኤል ለለኩሉ አወራህ...” (Ge'ez)

እሱም ለችግረኞች ምጽዋትን ይሰጥ የተራቆቱትንም ያለብስ ነበር። በቀንና በሌሊት በጾም በጸሎትና በስግደት ለእግዚአብሔር ይዝካ ነበር። የመላዕክት አለቃ ቅዱስ ሚካኤልንም ይወደወድ ዝክሩንም በየወሩ ይዘክር ነበር። (Amharic)

Which means: *He used to give alms for the poor and clothes for those who are naked. He fasted and prayed day and night, and pledged himself to God. Since he loves a lot the Angel Michael, he made the Angel's commemoration every month.*

On a typical occasion, Mikael commissioned a certain monk to go to the church of Geshan Maryam 86 km from Dessie entrusting him with a considerable amount of money to give to the poor. When the monk returned, Mikael asked him to report on his mission. The monk replied:

“ነዳያኑም የሰማዩ ሚካኤል ያድድርግልን እያሉ መርቀዋል”

*The poor blessed you saying let God make you the Angel Michael.*³²

He regrets his father died a Muslim. Therefore, Mikael is said to have asked a leading scholar of the Orthodox Church, *Mamher Akale-Wold*:

“መምህር ሆይ የአባቴን አፅም ከመቃብር አውጥቼ ባስጠምቀው ክርስቶስ በመንግስቱ ይቀበላቸው ይሆን?”;

³² Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tēna Iyasu*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1996), p. 142, Informant: *Liye-Kahenat Taye Tsegaw*

“Mamher, if I exhume the remains of my father from the grave and get it baptized, will God accept his soul in his kingdom?”

Mamher Akale-Wold told him that this cannot be done. But he advised him to build a church on the graveyard of his father.³³ This he did. Among the churches he constructed, those that continue to serve the community, and that are examples of his generosity and piety are Tanta Mikael,³⁴ Boru-Meda Dabra Berhan Selassie Church, Dessie Dabra Madhanit Madhane-Alam, Bilan Giorgis and Tadbaba-Maryam³⁵.



³³ Yohannes Afewerk (Esdros), *Ye Memher Akale-Wold Serse-Wold Tarikna Qenéwochachewu*. [The Biography of Mamher Akala-Wald and his poems], (Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University Press, 2002EC) , p.82

³⁴ Ras Mikael has given greater attention for the construction of Tanta Mikael church. While most of the churches were constructed by local engineers and local materials in a traditional fashion, Tanta Mikael was constructed by an Italian engineer with inputs imported from abroad. It is very much different for its construction since it is a modern type of building never constructed in the region. Tanta Mikael became a home for many of Mikael's possessions. A number of his clothes, official garments, crowns, arrows and shields, manuscripts, letters sent to and from Mikael, as well as his personal materials, are on view at the church museum. Mikael provided an extensive number of gifts made of gold and silver, necessary for church ceremonies such as crosses, drums and sticks, carpets, manuscripts, books, sacerdotal garments and so on.

³⁵ Tadbaba-Maryam is an ancient church (next to Axum) found in Amhara Sayint, a district where Mikael was brought up. It is believed that religious activities in the area of Tadbaba-Maryam started from the time when the Arc of the Covenant reached Aksum. Written sources indicate that beginning from 1000BCE, Old Testament (Hebrew) religious practices were carried out at four different places in Ethiopia, one of which was the site of Tadbaba-Maryam church. Because of its long years of history and service, the church is referred to as “ርዕሰ ኢድባራት ወገዳማት ተደባበ ማርያም” meaning *Head of Churches and Monasteries Tadbaba-Maryam*.

The current church is constructed by Ras Mikael. Folder No. . 03. File No. 04. A letter from Ye Borena Awuraja Bete Kehenet Sefet Bet to Ya Borena Awuraja Gezat, South Wollo Diocese Reference No. 367/52, Hamle 7, 1952



Figure 7 The Church of Tenta Mikael. Photograph taken on 19 May 2017



Figure 8 The Curch of Tedebe Maryam. Photograph taken on 22 May 2017

From Ras to Negus

Soon after the death of Emperor Menelik in 1913, members of the nobility and council of ministers requested that *Lij Iyasu*,³⁶ the legal heir, be crowned king of kings and sit on the throne of his grandfather. Iyasu however, told the councilors that he would not be crowned before his father was appointed *Negus* and the lands of Eritrea were incorporated into the empire.

Lij Iyasu mentioned his vision:

“አባቴን ንጉሥ ሳለሰኝ ፈረሴን ከቀይ ባሕር ውሃ ሳለጠጣ ዘውድ ጭኝ ንጉሠ ነገሥት አልባልም”³⁷

*“I will never be crowned Emperor before I get my father crowned and my horse drinks from the waters of the Red Sea”*³⁸

According to the chronicler of *Lij Iyasu*, Gebre-Igziabher, Iyasu’s motive was to strengthen and consolidate his power. Since Iyasu is a descendant of an Emperor through his mother, he wanted to be known as the “son of two kings” and this would be true if his father was crowned *Negus*. He would, therefore, establish a second legitimacy to his rule. The young emperor designate thus appointed his father, *Negus* of Wollo.³⁹

Ras Mikael was crowned *Negus* of Wollo and Tigray at Dessie on 31 May 1914 by the Egyptian bishop for Tigray and Wollo *Abuna Petros* (Peter). The coronation ceremony took place in the

³⁶ *Lij Iyasu* was the son of *Ras Mikael* of Wollo, the grandson of Emperor Menelik and the legal heir to the throne. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

³⁷ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: Ye Zeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922*. [*The Turn of the 20th Century: My memory from What I Saw and Heard*] Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C., p.113

³⁸ The speech “before I let my horse drink from the water of the Red Sea” implies his wish to secure a port for Ethiopia i.e Massawa in Eritrea

³⁹ Wolbert G.C. Smidt, “The coronation of Nagus Mikael in Dase in May 1914: A photograph from the Nachlass Jensen and its Historical Back ground,” In *Annales d’Ethiopie*. Vol. XVII, 2001, p.368 Gebre-Egziabher Elyas, (Molvaer Reidulf trans. & ed.), *Prowess, Piety and Politics. The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia 1909-193*, (Köln: 1994), p.346.

village known as Hote. The great nobility of the empire, religious dignitaries, foreigners and some fifty thousand people attended the ceremony. On the day of his coronation, the new *Negus* appointed five *Dajazmachs* as *Ras*. A German diplomat, Lorenz Jensen, who attended the ceremony, took photographs of the crowned Mikael, one of which is below.⁴⁰



Figure 9 Negus Mikael

⁴⁰ Wolbert G.C. Smidt, *The coronation of Nagus Mikael*. . . , 362); Gobaze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, p.59

The former seal of Mikael which reads “ራስ ሚካኤል ርዕሰ መሳፍንት” (*Ras Mikael head of nobility*) was changed to “ዘሰልጣኑ ጽሑፍ ዲበ መትከፍቱ ሚካኤል ንጉሠ ፅዮን ንጉሠ ወሎ ወትግሬ” Mikael king of Wollo and Tigray who holds the insignia of his sovereignty on his shoulders.⁴¹

Iyasu did not attend the ceremony. He was represented by a high-level delegation consisting of his loyal noblemen *Ligabba* Walda-Gabriel (head of the cavalry) and *Bajerond* Yigazu Bahabte (treasurer general). Imperial weapons, abundant jewels made of silver and gold, royal garments, the crown of Menelik and other materials necessary for the coronation ceremony, were transported and brought to Dessie. These added much pomp and beauty to the coronation. The transportation of the crown and the royal garments to Dessie, however, created grievance among the Shewan nobility as it appeared as if there was a transfer of power from Shewa to Wollo.⁴²

5.2 Centralization and Consolidation of Wollo Province by *Ras/Negus Mikael*

During *Zemene Mesafint*, while the Empire was in a weak state, Wollo was administered by strong local Muslim dynasties who had dominated the imperial politics.⁴³ Following the collapse of those dynasties due to the political and religious consolidation task by Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, Wollo was in a divided state into various smaller chieftains within it. Later, it

⁴¹ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.114; Assefa Balcha. *The Court of Negus Mikael: An Analysis of Its Structure and a Description of the Role of 'Ayteyef' Hall*. BA Thesis, Addis Abbaba University: Department of History, 1984, pp.13-14.

⁴² Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974*. London: James Currey, 1991, p.125; Gebre-Egziabher Elyas, *Prowess, Piety and Politics. The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu*, pp. 346-347.

⁴³ Abir Mordechai, *The era of princes, The Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855*, (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1968), p.27; Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo* . . . , p1.

was Mikael who unified the divided districts of the province under one centralized administration by the last quarter of nineteenth century.

Though Tewodros made repeated campaigns towards Wollo with the aim of integrating the region, he was resisted by the warlords of the province one after another. Thus, the task of integrating the province by Tewodros was not completed.⁴⁴ During the reign of Yohannes, Wollo was divided between his own son, *Ras Araya-Selasse* and *Ras Mikael*.⁴⁵ But *Ras Araya-Selasse* was not in a position to live in Wollo and administer the province so that Wollo was not under effective control.

By 1886 Mikael had become the sole ruler of Wollo recognized by Emperor Yohannes. In the following years, *Ras Mikael* executed the double task of centralizing Wollo under himself and integrating it with the rest of the Empire. As Fekadu stated, the integration of Wollo was carried out through several stages from Tewodros to Menelik. The final stage was carried out mainly through one man- *Ras Mikael*.⁴⁶

The way Wollo was integrated with the modern Ethiopian empire is different from other provinces. Some other provinces were integrated either through peaceful submission or through forceful Subjugation.⁴⁷ But, Wollo was integrated with the great effort of its leader *Ras Mikael*.

In order to integrate Wollo with the rest of the empire and consolidate his power over the region, Mikael used different mechanisms. One of these mechanisms was using political marriage. He

⁴⁴ Donald Crummey, "The Violence of Tewodros," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.IX, No.2, 1971, p.111; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 30

⁴⁵ Ghelawdewos Araia, "The Martyred King of Kings: Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia," July 3 2006, (www.africanidea.org/atse_yohannes.pdf) p. 4; Heran Sereqe-Berhan, "Like Adding Water to Milk: Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth century Ethiopia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. Vol.38 No.1, 2005, p.58

⁴⁶ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo. . . , p.57

⁴⁷ Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia* . . . , p.61.

arranged a marriage alliance between his daughters and the different lords of the province. He allowed *Janterar* Asfaw Ali of Ambasal to marry his daughter Sehin. This marriage helped Mikael to avoid the traditional enmity between the *Mammadoch* and the ruling family of Ambasel.⁴⁸ In addition, he married two of his daughters, Mentwab to *Dajach* Gabra-Egziabher of Tahuladare, and Tewabach to *Dajach* Birru Mohammed of Riqe. He also arranged a marriage alliance between his granddaughter by Sehin, Manan Asfaw and *Fitawrari* Ali Mohammed of Chiracha.⁴⁹ This enabled him to strengthen his influence on the region and consolidate his power.

The other mechanism Mikael used to integrate Wollo and consolidate his power was territorial expansion. In the 1890s Mikael incorporated the large low land area of Awusa, which mostly inhabited by the Afar people, with the rest of the region. The integration of Awusa contributed to an increase in economic and social interaction between the low land districts and other parts of Wollo through which the trade routes to the coast passed. This brought prosperity to the region and its rulers.⁵⁰

After 1887, Mikael emerged as the sole ruler of Wollo. Following his appointment as a general governor of Wollo in 1886, Mikael shifted his headquarter from Tanta to Dessie, which is a better strategically located area sited in the center of the province. Mikael constructed his court at Dessie and then administered the region centered at the town.

⁴⁸ Heruy Wolde-Sellasie, *Ya Hiwot Tarik*. [The Story of Life] Addis Ababa: 1915 E.C. p.22.

⁴⁹ Richard A. Caulk, *Religion and the State*. . . , p.36

⁵⁰ Asnake Ali. "Aspects of the Political History of Wallo, p.43, Ye Dessie Ketema, MS, No.688, Institute of Ethiopia Studies, undated, p.50



Figure 10 The court of Negus Mikael



Figure 11 Mikael's Residence in the court campus (Photograph taken by the researcher. 08/03 2017)

Mikael's success in consolidating his power led to peace and prosperity. As contemporary sources and informants explained, the years of his rule in Wollo are remembered as being times of peace and prosperity. His period of rule in Wollo is said to have been peaceful by which political stability was achieved. Contemporary written and oral sources enlightened that Mikael illuminated banditry which troubled socio-economic conditions in the region. He had taken serious measures on those bandits who wanted to continue robbing. He is said to have severely punished bandits so as to pacify and stabilize the region. Thus, with the rise of Mikael, banditry was reduced.⁵¹

It is reported that his administration was efficient, and liberal, as compared to other regional administrations. In a letter Emperor Menelik wrote to *Ras-Bitwaded* Mangasha, the governor of Meça and Yilmana districts, he criticized *Ras-Bitwaded's* administration while appreciating *Ras Mikael's* administration. A part of the letter reads:

“... ሜጫና ይልማናን እንዲህ አድርገህ ታስጨንቀዋለህ? ... እኔስ ነጭ ማር ስደድልኝ ማለቴ የዚያ አገር ማር መልካም ነውና ላንተ ከሚገባልህ መርጠህ ላክልኝ አልኩ እንጅ ነጭ ማር ካላመጣችሁ እያልክ ድሃውን የምታስጨንቀው በምን ነገር ነው? ... አገዛዝስ እንደነ ራስ ሚካኤል እንደነራስ ወሌ ነው እንጂ ...”

... *Why do you oppress the people of Meça and Yilmana? When I ordered you to send me white honey, it is from your own share. Why do you force the peasants to bring white honey? ... Good governance is like that of Ras Mikael and Ras Walle ...*⁵²

⁵¹ Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*, London: Methuen & Co., (1901), p. 383; Asnake Ali. “Aspects of the Political History of Wallo. . . , p. 43

⁵² Paulos Nono, *Atse Menilek Be Hager wusŷ yetesasafuachewu Debdabewoch* [The Letters of Emperor Menelik for Domestic Adresses], (Addis Ababa: Aster Nega publisher.2003E.C), p. 54
Personally, *Ras Mikael* was a man of great patience, honesty and of generous personality. His patient nature is revealed in a message Empress Taytu, wife of Menilek, sent him. *Ras Wole* and *Ras Mikael* were preparing to fight each other because of border disputes, and Taytu intervened as mediator. In the letter she wrote to *Ras Mikael*, she

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Mikael extended the territory of Wollo beyond the historical limits of Bete Amhara. He incorporated the Yejju domain, districts of the northern part of Wollo such as the Agaw speaking areas of Wag, the Christian dominant areas of Wadla, Delanta and Lasta and also the extents of Raya Kobbo. In such a way the multi cultural province of Wollo proper by which different ethnic and cultural groups lived together was formed. In the newly incorporated districts of Wollo proper, Mikael appointed his sons, grandsons and courtiers. He appointed his son *Dejazmach* Gebre-Hiwot a governor of Delanta in 1909 and later Wag, the most northern district of the province. He also appointed his grandson, *Jantirar* Haile-Maryam, governor of Yejju.⁵³

During the twentieth century, the territory of Wollo as an administrative province of the Ethiopian state has extended as far as the borders of Tigray in the north, to Karakore in the south, to Chachaho in the west, and in the east to the frontier of Djibouti.⁵⁴ By this time Wollo province was divided in two twelve *Awurajas* (sub-provinces) namely: Wag, Lasta, Raya-Qobbo, Yejju, Wadla-Delanta, Ambasel, Dessie-Zuria, Wore-Himano, Borena, Wore-Illu, Qallu, and Awusa. As an integrated province, Wollo played its own role in the socio-economic and political life of the Ethiopian empire.

underlined: "... since you are patient always let you leave him as before ... " Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , pp.68-69

⁵³ Abdul Mohammed, A Biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael 1868-1963" BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1990, p. 19

⁵⁴ Siegbert Uhlig (Ed.), *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*. Vol. 4, Harrassowitz, 2011, p. 1119

Awraja was an administrative division in twentieth century Ethiopia which is lesser in terms of area than a province. Currently, Wollo province is divided into four administrative zones; North Wollo, South Wollo, Wag=Himra zone and Oromia special zone (for those nearly 400, 000 Oromos living in Amhara region of former Wollo province) According to the recent division, the former Wag awraja becomes Wag-Himra zone, part of Qallu awraja is made Oromia special zone, part of Raya included in Tigray region and the low land Awusa is structured the present Afar region.

5.3 Wollo's role in the socio-economic and political life of the country

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Ras Mikael adjusted socio-economic and political conditions. By this time Wollo's importance in the socio-political development of Ethiopia increased. Under Mikael, Wollo took part in the socio-economic and political life of the country. Among others is the role it played in defending the nation from colonial invasion.

Ethiopian victory over the Italian colonial expansion at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 was the cumulative result of all Ethiopian regions and peoples. At Adwa, Wollo played a crucial role under the leadership of its governor, *Ras Mikael*.

Just like his predecessors, *Ras Mikael* is said to have been a strong and brave fighter. He was known for building a strong army that had put its legacy in the history of the country. The British traveler who visited Ethiopia in 1887, Sir Gerald Portal, had the chance to personally visit and study the military forces of *Ras Mikael*. He estimated the total number of the army to be not less than fifty thousand, but the fighting men half of this number. Most of them were composed of the cavalry. By the turn of the century, this number increased to an army of seventy thousand. According to Marcus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the army of *Ras Mikael* was considered to be one of the best in Ethiopia.⁵⁵

Leading the army, *Ras Mikael* participated in many battles and fought to defend the empire from foreign invasions. The first of these was at Saati in Eritrea. On June 3, 1884, Ethiopia signed a treaty with the British government. In this treaty which came to be known as the treaty of Adwa,

⁵⁵ Gerarld H. Portal, *An Account of the English Mission to King Yohannes of Abyssinia* in 1887, (Winchester: 1888), p.118; Harold G. Marcus, *Haylessellasi I. The Formative Years 1892-1936*, (London: 1987), p.22
Written sources referred to Mikael's soldiers as the "*Galla*" forces. This might be misleading as meaning his forces were entirely Oromos. Many of his soldiers were recruited from the non-Oromo speaking districts of Wara-Ilu, Lasta, Dalanta, Ambasel, Amhara Sayint and the like.

better known as the Hewett treaty, Emperor Yohannes agreed to facilitate the evacuation of the trapped Egyptian soldiers in Sudan through Ethiopia to Massawa. In return, the areas evacuated were promised to Ethiopia. More importantly, free transit of Ethiopian goods and services through the port of Massawa was also arranged.⁵⁶ Even though Yohannes fulfilled his responsibility of evacuating the Egyptian army in accordance with the Hewett Treaty, instead of abiding by said treaty, the British and Egyptians left Massawa to the Italians. The Italians occupied the port on 5 February 1885 and became the sole masters of the area.⁵⁷

The Italians announced a blockade at Massawa of all arms and goods to and from Ethiopia. Moreover, the Italians, who were interested in colonizing Ethiopia, marched inland from port Massawa in order to occupy the village of Saati which is thirty kilometers to the interior. Towards the end of 1886, the Italians expanded their frontier in land to the country. The area they controlled was estimated to be about a thousand square kilometers.⁵⁸

By this time when the country was invaded by the Italians, *Ras Mikael* of Wollo marched to the north with his army to take part in the expected battle of Saati to defend his country from the invaders.⁵⁹ Gerald Portal estimated the number of forces who marched towards Saati to be not less than seventy thousand persons. By his account, the army of *Ras Mikael* was the second largest next to the Emperor's own army⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Hussien Ahmed (Birgader General), "The Military Aspect of the battle of Dogali". The Centenary of Dogali. *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, Addis Ababa-Asmara, January 24-25, 1987, Addis Ababa: 1988, pp.41-42.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.69; Richard Pankhurst, "Ras Alula, Dogali and the beginnings of the Italian colonialism on the Horn of Africa", The Centenary of Dogali. *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, Addis Ababa-Asmara, January 24-25, 1987, Addis Ababa: 1988, p.124.

⁵⁸ Neguse Ayele, "Ras Alula and Ethiopians struggle against expansionism and colonialism 1872-1897", *In Proceedings of the International Symposium*. Addis Ababa-Asmara, January 24-25, 1987. The century of Dogali, Addis Ababa: Artistic printing press, 1988, p.69

⁵⁹ Gerald H. Portal, *An Account of the English Mission*. . . , p.121,

⁶⁰ , Gerald H. Portal, *An Account of the English Mission* . . . , p.64.

At the time when Ethiopian forces were engaged in repulsing the invading Italian forces, the Dervishes launched another invasion from the west. In this invasion, which is considered as the first big invasion against the country, the Dervishes entered as far as Gondar, burning the town and capturing and killing many thousands of its inhabitants.⁶¹

On his way back from Saati, Yohannes was informed that the Dervishes had devastated Gondar. In order to avert the situation, the emperor prepared a campaign against them. He also declared a mobilization of forces to defend the empire. Learning of the declaration, Mikael joined forces with Yohannes and campaigned along with the emperor against this dangerous enemy. He led a large cavalry of some twenty-five thousand warriors.⁶²

According to the account of Wylde, a British adventurer who witnessed the battle, the Dervishes camped at Metemma and built strong defenses. On the Ethiopian side, while *Ras Mengesha*, the Emperor's son, and *Ras Alula* commanded on the one flank, *Ras Mikael* led his army on the opposite flank. Wylde continued to describe the situation in the fighting saying “*Ras Mengesha* and his troops were the first to gain an entrance on one side and, *Ras Mikael* soon made good his attack on the other.”⁶³ When the Ethiopian historian, Fekadu, explained the fighting strength of *Ras Mikael* and his Wollo forces he said, “*Ras Mikael* showed the strength of his troops at the battle of Metemma by breaking into the Dervishes fortifications along with *Ras Mengesha*.” In this battle Wollo had lost one of its famous war generals *Ras Yimar* of Wara-Himano.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* . . . , p.40; Hussien (Birgader General), *The Military Aspect of the battle of Dogali*. . . , p.54; P.M. Holt, *The Mahadist state of the Sudan 1881- 1898*, (Oxford: 1970), pp.166-167.

⁶² Ghelawdewos Araia, *The Martyred King of Kings: Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*, July 2006. [https://www.africanidea.org/The%20Martyred%20King%20of%20Kings\[1\].pdf](https://www.africanidea.org/The%20Martyred%20King%20of%20Kings[1].pdf); Chris Rosenfelled, *A Chronology of Menilek II of Ethiopia*, p.132; Richard Caulk, “Fire Arms and Princely power in the Nineteenth Century Ethiopia,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 4., 1972, p. 620

⁶³ Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* . . . , pp.40-41

⁶⁴ Fekadu Begna, “A Tentative History of Wallo. . . , pp.54-55.

The role of Wollo forces in defending the country from foreign invasion continued during the famous battle of Adwa⁶⁵ in 1896. In spite of their resounding defeat at Dogali in 1887, the Italians were unable to set aside their colonial ambitions towards Ethiopia. They thus began to conquer and occupy the northern part of the country.

Infuriated, Emperor Menelik declared a state of preparation for war against the invaders. The declaration reads as follows:

“ . . . አሁንም አገር የሚያጠፋ ሃይማኖት የሚለውጥ ጠላት እግዚአብሔር የወሰነልንን የባህር በር አልፎ መጥቷል። . . . እያለፈ እንደፍልፈል መሬት ይቆፍር ጀመር። አሁን ግን በእግዚአብሔር ረዳትነት አገሬን አሳልፌ አልሰጠውም። . . . ጉልበት ያለህ በጉልበትህ እርዳኝ። ጉልበት የሌለህ ለልጅህ፣ ለሚስትህ፣ ለሃይማኖትህ ስትል እርዳኝ። . . . ዘመቻዬም በጥቅምት ነዉና እስከ ጥቅምት እኩሌታ ድረስ ወረኢሉ ከተህ ላግኝህ። ”⁶⁶

“ . . . *Enemy comes that would ruin our country and change our religion has come. It passed beyond the sea that God gave us our border. These enemies have advanced, burrowing into the country like moles . . . With the help of God; I will get ever caused me sorrow. . . .Now, you who are strong, lend me your strong arms, and you who are weak, help me with*

⁶⁵ The battle of Adwa had a significant national and international consequence. It occupies a unique place in Ethiopian and African Historiography. In addition to sending shocking waves to imperialist Europe, Adwa became a beacon of freedom for Africans and other freedom loving peoples in the rest of the world. When the editor of *London Times* elucidated the possible impact of Ethiopian victory over the Italians at Adwa, he underlined “This victory will arouse the spirit of the Africans who until today have been treated with contempt as pagans” Hosea Jaffe also considered Adwa as a “watershed in the rise of African liberation movements and thinking.” Because it encouraged anti colonial struggles in Africa. According to Donald Levine the victory of Adwa stimulated the energies of South African blacks. It lifted up the spirit of anti colonial resistances among the Zulu of South Africa. Similarly, a Nigerian Historian compared the battle of Adwa with the battle of Isandlwana, (which was the first major encounter between the British Empire and the Zulu kingdom) since both battles were fought with great courage and for the same purpose i.e. defending oneself.³⁴ So in one or the other way, spiritually or secularly, Adwa had galvanized anti colonial resistance movements across Africa generally and South Africa specifically

⁶⁶ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek*. . . , p.225.

your prayers, while you think of your children, your wife, and your faith . . . assemble and meet me at Were-Ilu, and may you be there by the middle of October.”

In response to this national call to arms, *Ras Mikael* of Wollo put himself at the disposal of the Emperor.⁶⁷

The first battle between the two forces took place at Ambalage on December 7, 1895. As Berkley, a recorder of the battle explained, *Ras Mikael* had lined up fifteen thousand men in this battle. Then the combined forces of *Ras Mikael*, *Ras Mekonen* and *Ras Mengesha* defeated the Italians and killed their commander, Tosseli.⁶⁸

However, the decisive battle took place at Adwa on March 1, 1896. On the night of February 29 and the early morning of March 1 the Italians advanced towards Adwa. Their battle plan was to attack from three different directions. While the Italian major, Dabormida commanded the right flank, his counterpart Albertone led the left. The central battalions were commanded by major Arimondi.⁶⁹

On the Ethiopian side, the right flank was commanded by *Negus Tekle-Haymanot*, the left by *Ras Alula* and the center by *Ras Mengesha* and *Ras Mekonnen* with *Ras Mikael* at the head of the Wollo cavalry. The forces of the emperor and that of Empress Taytu, wife to Menelik,

⁶⁷ Fekadu Begna, “A Tentative History of Wallo, p. 57

⁶⁸ G.F.H. Berkley, *The campaign of Adowa and the rise of Menilek*, (Westminster: 1902), p.135; David Levering Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda: European colonialism and African Resistance in the scramble for Africa*, (1st ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 1988, p.116.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*. . . , p.117.

remained in reserve. The decisive positions in the battle were given to the *Ras Mikael*, *Mengesha* and *Mekonnen*.⁷⁰

On the center front, the forces of *Arimondi* were stationed in such a defensive position, that it was difficult to attack. They tried all they could to prevent the Ethiopian army from making their onward advance, but they were outnumbered. On this front, it was *Ras Mikael* who led his *Wollo* infantry and smashed through the Italian battalions in the center, along with *Ras Mengesha* and *Ras Wolle*. The forces of *Arimondi* crumbled and he was killed on the battlefield.⁷¹

After successfully completing this offensive, *Mikael* moved to the right flank to assist *Ras Alula* who was engaging with *Dabormida*. As *Mikael* joined *Ras Alula*, his soldiers chanted:

Who shall tell the Italians

That *Mikael* came dressed up with fire⁷²

This was said to express the fighting skill of *Mikael* and his army.

As soon as the forces of *Wollo* arrived, conditions at the front changed. It is reported that when *Mikael's* frightening *Oromo* cavalry forces advanced, the Italian soldiers began retreating saying *Reap! Reap!* as they fled the cavalry. On this front, *Ras Mikael* and *Ras Alula* utterly overwhelmed the enemy forces and killed the commander, *Major Dabormida*.⁷³

⁷⁰ Adwa, www.ethiopianforums.com/Adwa.html; First Italo-Abyssinian War (1895-1896) ethiopiamilitary.com/first-italo-abyssinian-war-1895-1896/.

⁷¹ Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* . . . , pp.206 & 208; Tekle-Tsadik Mekuriya, *Atse Yohannes ena ye Ityopeya Andenet* [Emperor Yohannes and the Unity of Ethiopia] Addis Ababa: Kuraz Printing press, 1982 E.C, pp.388-393

⁷² Informant: *Ato Mekonen Ali*.

⁷³ Berkley, *The campaign of Adowa and the rise of Menilek*, p.118; Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* . . . , p.209

Then, the full Ethiopian force began an attack on Albertone's brigade. The cavalry of *Ras Mikael* took part in the left flank together with other *Ras* and their forces. They ambushed the enemy forces and those that were able, fled, leaving many dead on the battlefield.⁷⁴

Fekadu's assessment of the role of *Ras Mikael* and his Wollo forces at the Battle of Adwa was the following: "In this battle, *Ras Mikael* and his Wollo troops had fought to save the empire from the invaders. They had invested blood for the integrity of the empire."⁷⁵

The Battle of Adwa represented a turning point in Ethiopian history. *Ras Mikael* of Wollo can be counted as one of the fearsome leaders who helped protect Ethiopia from Italian advancement. Through the ages, the people have expressed their admiration for all the emperor's chief commanders in the following way:

“... እነ ንጉሥ ተክለሃይማኖት፣ እነ ራስ መንገሻ ዮሐንስ እነ ራስ ሚካኤል እንደምን ለአፄ ምኒልክ አበሩላቸዉ! ...”

... How king Tekle-Haymanot, Ras Mengesha Yohannes, Ras Mikael shined for Menelik . .⁷⁶

Even though all the Ethiopian chief commanders played their own great role at the battle of Adwa, Mikael dedicated more by fighting in all the three fronts. As a result, the role of Wollo as a region and that of Mikael as a leader in defending the country's sovereignty should be remembered and preserved.

In addition to participating in being a combatant at Adwa, the peasants of Wollo had played their own social role by accompanying the fighters who were marching to Adwa. As per the

⁷⁴ Berkley, *The campaign of Adowa and the rise of Menilek* . . . , p.280; Augustus B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* . . . , p.208

⁷⁵ Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo. . . , p.59

⁷⁶ Tekle-Tsadik Mekuriya, *Atse Yohannes ena ye Ityopeya Andenet*. . . , p. 268.

instruction of Emperor Menelik, the one hundred thousand fighters of Adwa have met at Were-Ilu, in Wollo. Until the fighters arrived to the war zone of Tigray, those peasants of Wollo who settled along the path where the fighters voyaged had their national duties by preparing food and feeding the combatants traveling to Adwa. Moreover, as the Ethiopian army was on its way to Adwa, famous players and performers of Wollo encouraged the warriors in poetry and songs. This is said to have been instrumental in inspiring the fighters and thereby contributing to the victory.⁷⁷

His heroic participation at the Battle of Adwa and the overall role he played in the socio-political conditions of Wollo seems to have helped Mikael to establish positive relations with the Emperors particularly Menelik.



5.4 Mikael and the Emperors Yohannes and Menelik

Mikael is known for establishing a strong affiliation with Emperors Yohannes and Menelik. This paved the way for him to have a significant part in the politics of the period. During the reign of the three successive Emperors, Yohannes, Menelik and *Lij* Iyasu, Mikael had involved in the various socio-political affairs of the empire.

Since Emperor Yohannes was the godfather of *Ras* Mikael, the two leaders had a strong intimacy. Mikael became a faithful vassal and ally of the Emperor. He assisted the emperor in a variety of ways, administratively and militarily. For instance, when the Hewett Treaty was signed between Emperor Yohannes and Sir William Hewett on June 3, 1884, political dignitaries on both sides attended the event. *Ras* Mikael was among those who attended, representing his

⁷⁷ Oral informants: Ato Sertse Firesibhat and Ato Mesfin Arage

country, together with other *Ras* at the international bilateral ceremony.⁷⁸ In 1888 when Menelik of Shewa and Tekle-Haymanot of Gojjam allied against Yohannes, *Ras* Mikael supported him against the rebels.⁷⁹ As a longtime friend and ally of Yohannes, *Ras* Mikael allied with the Emperor and fought against the dervishes of Sudan until the emperor died on the battlefield at Matamma on 9 March 1889.⁸⁰

At the death of Emperor Yohannes, Menelik declared himself Emperor of Ethiopia. Consequently, Mikael decided to go to Addis Ababa to submit to Menelik. Then, he met Menelik and gave his allegiance.⁸¹ In return, Menelik acknowledged him as a ruler of Wollo. He continued to be a favorite of the new Emperor. Mikael demonstrated his loyalty to Menelik by accompanying him in his march against the revolt of *Ras* Mengesha Yohannes of Tigray in 1890. He also cooperated with the Emperor in his various domestic activities.⁸²

As a result of this many letters were exchanged between the two leaders. Various national responsibilities were also given to *Ras* Mikael from the Emperor. For instance, in one of the letters Menelik sent to Mikael, he ordered Mikael to receive and accompany an Italian delegation that entered the country via the Afar region.⁸³

⁷⁸ Hussien Ahmed (Birgader General), "The Military Aspect of the battle of Dogali. . . , p.41

⁷⁹ Harold G Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p.108; Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wallo. . . , p.54

⁸⁰ Augustus Blandy Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*, p. 40

⁸¹ Afeworq Gebreyesus, *Atse Menilek* [Emperor Melilek], (Rome, 1901), p.57; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek* . . . , p.155; Richard Caulk, *Fire Arms* . . . , p. 624

Mikael decided to go to Addis Ababa to submit to Menilek, but he feared retaliation for their earlier conflicts. It was Sheikh Hussien Jibril, the famous Muslim scholar and his advisor, who allayed his fears and advised him to go and submit by reassuring him that he would not be harmed. On the advice of Hussien, Mikael left for Addis Ababa, met with Menilek and gave him his allegiance.

⁸² Wolbert G.C. Smidt, "The Foreign Politics of Lij Iyasu in 1915/16 According to newly discovered government papers," In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Trondheim: 2009, p.168

⁸³ Paulos Nono, *Atse Menilek* . . . , p. 253

Ras Mikael served as a mediator in those conflicts between the lords of the time. A typical example is the conflict between the Emperor and *Ras* Mengesha of Tigray. Following the death of Emperor Yohannes, there was a power rivalry between Menelik and *Ras* Mengesha Yohannes. In spite of the coronation of the former as king of kings, the later did not accept his overlordship. As a result, they had quarreled each other. When the two personalities were reconciled in January 1893 at Addis Abbaba, Mikael was there as a mediator.⁸⁴

Mikael took part in the campaign which was made to incorporate Wolayta. As part of his expansion for the creation of the Modern Ethiopian Empire, Menelik organized a campaign towards Wolayta in 1894. Mikael participated in the campaign accompanying the Emperor together with *Fitawrari* Gebeyehu, *Lika-Maquas* Abbata and *Dajach* Haile-Maryam.⁸⁵

As a reward to his loyalty, the Emperor allowed *Ras* Mikael to marry his daughter Shewarega, from whom was born a son, Lij Iyasu, the crown prince. The marriage strengthened their relationship which proved to be long-lasting. It enabled Mikael to be a member of the Solomonic line through his wife and son.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Wurse, Vol.1 No.1, 1990E.C, p.8

⁸⁵ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, “*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek* . . .”, p.220

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 192; Informant: Ato Kebede Rufe.

Menilek arranged several marriages, probably hoping thereby to secure the throne through the increased loyalty of some of the notables as well as by getting a grandson as a success.

Before marrying Shewarega, Mikael had married seven different women from different areas and regions. Among his wives Manalābesh, the daughter of Menelik’s concubine Bafana, is said to have been given to Mikael by Menelik so that she could keep an eye on him for the emperor. Referring to her passionate nature Mikael is said to have composed: ባልሽ ማመድ አሊ, አንቺ ማናሉብሽ ለየትኛው ዳኛ አቤት ልባልብሽ (*Your husband is Mohammed Ali but you don’t fear any one / By which judge I shall defend you*)



Figure 12 Mikael with two of his children: Lij Iyasu (right) and Waizero Seheen (Left)

After Mikael married Shewarega, a close relationship was created between the Emperor and Mikael. This was demonstrated by Mikael's frequent presence at Menelik's court on important national occasions and events.⁸⁷ Moreover, the Emperor also used to make repeated visits to Dessie as if the town seems to be his second city. He is also said to have spent some religious holidays such as *Tensae* (Easter) and *Ledät* (Christmass) in Dessie.⁸⁸

In the following years, Mikael emerged as one of Menelik's chief lieutenants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ethiopia, *Ras* Mikael became one of the most significant personalities in the empire.⁸⁹

In sum, many of the socio-political situations of Wollo had been shaped during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By this time, Wollo was transformed from a buffer zone into a political center. The emergence of Wollo as a powerful regional force led to the Wollo-Shewa political rivalry that characterizes the political history of early twentieth century Ethiopia. This finally resulted in the fall of *Lij* Iyasu and the end of Wollo's ascendancy and its exclusion from the central Ethiopian politics.

⁸⁷ Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek* . . . , pp. 197-200; Informant: Ato Tesfaye Amede.

⁸⁸ Gebre-Kidan Wolde-Hawaryat, *Be Wollo Kefle Hager Bahelna Sport Guday Minister Kerenchaf Mesriyabet Betarik Zerf yeteseru Serawoch* [Historical Document Recorded by the Cultutre and Sport Branch Office of Wällo Region.] (Dessie Tourism Office), Un published document, 1981, p.29; Gebre-Selassie Wolde-Aregay, "*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagemawi Menilek* . . . , p.23

⁸⁹ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.44.

Chapter Six

Power Politics Rivalry between Wollo and Shewa

Introduction

Following the designation of *Lij* Iyasu as an heir to the Imperial throne and the appointment of *Ras* Mikael as king of the northern provinces of Wollo and Tigray, Wollo transformed from a buffer zone to a political center. This development is said to have marked a shift of power from Shewa to Wollo. But the growing position of Wollo has been challenged by the Shewan ruling elites. This led to a power rivalry to political supremacy between the ruling elites of the two politically strong provinces of the time; Shewa and Wollo.

This chapter tries to explore the power rivalry between these two provinces and its outcome. The chapter details how and in what way Wollo's position was challenged by the Shewan contenders. I will also analyse how *Lij* Iyasu's background as a "Muslim Wolloye" became a crucial issue and was used by the Shewan side as a political instrument in the struggle to avoid the Wolloye prince from power.

6.1 The Appointment of a Wolloye Prince on the Ethiopian Imperial Throne

Early in 1906 Emperor Menelik had suffered a paralytic illness. In September of the same year, the British Ambassador to Ethiopia, Sir John Harrington reported that rumours about Menelik's health began to circulate in Addis Ababa and that it had become a matter of common talk in the town that he would not live many years longer. As his health deteriorated, the selection of a

successor becomes necessary. In this regard, the death of his son, Wosenseged and his cousin and the governor of Harar province, *Ras Mekonen*, in 1906 restricted the emperor's choice. In his own words, Menelik expressed his trouble in 1906 when he said "my only son Wosenseged died prematurely and *Ras Mekonen*, whom I had in mind as an alternative also died".¹ It seems that the emperor did not at all consider his daughter, Zewuditu, for succession.

Since Menelik had not surviving son of his own, he was confronted with the difficulty of selecting the person who was to become his heir. According to oral informants and contemporary sources, there were few pretenders to the throne such as *Ras Wolde Giorgis*, *Fitawurari Taye*, and *Fitawurari Habte Giorgis*, but due to various reasons, none of them were choices of Menelik. Finally, Menelik decided to nominate his grandson, the 12 years old young prince from Wollo, *Lij Iyasu*, who was the son of *Ras Mikael* of Wollo by Menelik's daughter princess *Shewarega Menelik*. Iyasu was born on 3 February 1897, in Dessie, the capital of Wollo. He was brought up at Menelik's palace in Addis Ababa. As the chronicler detailed Iyasu's early life, he grew up receiving honorable upbringing and noble breeding. Since his childhood, he received academic and military training which were given to members of the royal family such as horse

¹ Foreign Office Record 401/9 Harrington to Grey, September 11, 1909, Micro Film at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Hereafter I will use F.O; Solomon Gashaw, *Power Struggle in Addis Abbaba 1906-1916*. BA Thesis, Haile-Selasie I University: Department of History (1971), p. 4

riding, spear throwing, swimming and the study of language.²



Figure 13 Photograph about the education of Prince Iyasu, here reading the Psalm. (Photograph taken from Dessie Museum)

The issue of Iyasu's designation is said to have become a sensitive matter among the ruling elites who were not pleased with his appointment. Among these personalities, Menelek's wife, the Empress Tayitu, strongly objected the nomination of Iyasu. She was even intriguing to block Menelik from publicly proclaiming *Lij* Iyasu as his heir. Tayitu was preparing to replace the

² Gebre-Egizabher Elias, (Reidulf Molvaer trans. & ed.), *Prowess, Piety and Politics. The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia 1909-193*, Köln: 199, p. 314; Solomon Gashaw. *Power Struggle in Addis Abbaba: 1906-1916*. BA Thesis, Haile-Selassie I University: Department of History (1971), p. 3

young prince with Zewuditu, the daughter of Menelik, who was married to Ras Gugsa, the nephew of the Empress.³

One of the principal objections against him seems to be that he was descended from a dynasty of Muslim lords of Wollo. Some members of the Shewan nobility who were unhappy of Iyasus' Mohammedan lineage continued political intrigue at the court. The British ambassador revealed his account that by the time a recrudescence of opposition to *Lij* Iyasu as the future emperor was raised.⁴

Despite these antagonisms, in May 1908, Menilek assembled the principal chiefs and announced that he designated *Lij* Iyasu as his successor. As Iyasu was a younger boy, it was found necessary to appoint a regent for him so that Menelik nominated *Ras Bitwoded*⁵ Tesamma Nadew for the post of the guardianship of the young prince.

The announcement reads as follows:

*I, Menelik II, announce... this issue to Ethiopian princes, nobles and their people.
Listen to me carefully because the issue will yield dividends and profits, promote
freedom to our country, strengthen our forces, multiply our wealth, foster
tranquility and provide us health, and keeps enemies away at a distance. Lack of*

³ Charles Gorham, *The Lion of Judah: A life of Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia*. Ariel Books, New York (1966), p. 26, Leonard Mosley, *Haile Sellassie: The Conquering Lion*. London: 1964, p. 41

⁴ Éloi Ficquet, "Understanding Lij Iyasu through his Forefathers: The Mammedoch Imams of Wollo, In *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia: New Insights*, Éloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (Eds.), Northeast African History, Orality and Heritage, Zurich. 2014, pp.5-29,...F.O 401/13 Harvey to Grey, November 5, 1909

⁵ *Ras Bitwoded* was a title which is equivalent to a prime minister.

According to some sources, Menelik wanted to give the post of regency to the war minister, Fitawurari Habte Giorgis. But as Tayitu favored Ras Tessema who she thought amenable to her wishes, she is said to have pleaded Menelik to choose Tessema. Menelik was said to have pondered much over Tayitu's choice of Tessema and said "If you choose Tessema for the regency it is all right, His father Dejach Nadewu had been as a father to me and Tessema too was my son whom I raised. But I think that he is not good for Iyasu." From this situation, we can see that how far Menelik was very much concerned about the young Wolloye prince, his grandson Iyasu. Mekonnen Endalkachew, Melkam Beteseboch

love among governors and generals and the officers of the soldiers and people brought division into Shewa, Tigray, Gondar, Gojam –region-centeredness. Atse Tewodros said rise up to the people and let me unite the country and started unifying; the cruelty of the subjects annoyed him; he started unity and died. ... Atse Yohannes said stand up to the people and started morality (Christening), he also taught unifying. However, his goals were not met. I, Menelik II became King of Shewa for 24 years and never took a vacation even for a day. Instead, I am unifying what Gagn had destroyed. I made Harar submit and brought it to reunite with the rest of Ethiopia; I determined what belongs to the government and the citizens, and the Indian Ocean is my boundary. Ogaden, lowlands, Arusi, Borena, Sidamo, Kembata, Kefa, Gamu Gofa, Jima, Goma, Liqa Welega, Illubabor, and all these places. My people became many, and my country gained freedom.

Poverty and hunger, commotion and confusion were removed from the people. Now, by the grace of God it has been 17 years since I reigned as an Emperor. All together, I ruled for 41 years. All these happened or were achieved because Ethiopia was ruled by the permission of one entity, and under the rule of one order (power). Unity is stronger than steel, and the old adage states “two lazy folks are better than one strong man” or “Two are better than one.” Our forebearers (the Aksumites) ruled across the ocean Southern Arabia under unity. However, when they were divided, Gagn burnt them by fire for 15 years. There was never a time when united Ethiopians lost to an enemy; it is non-existent in history. It is for this advice that I assembled you; to strengthen unity. Perhaps

disunity may come after I am gone, and would lead to the disappearance of the country to the merriment of the enemy, or result in our country going away or our people being exiled (or governed), or that what I worked for and assembled would not be destroyed, the country becoming disunited again- such is my fear. Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave? -says Psalms, 89-8.

Therefore, afterwards I want to announce my heir to you. Born from my daughter W/o Shewagared and Ras Mikael, Iyasu is the heir to my throne. Give him recognition; follow him.

Menelik also communicated his decision of nominating his grandson to the foreign legations in Addis Ababa on 19 June 1908.⁶

Until the death of the regent on 11 April 1911, Iyasu had administered under the supervision of Ras Tessema Nadew. After the death of the regent, Ras Tessema, and Emperor Menelik, Lij Iyasu began to exercise his full authority. Particularly, between 1913 and 1916 he developed and pursued his own policy.⁷

One of the principal undertakings that Iyasu accomplished was promoting the position of his father, Mikael, from *Ras* to *Negus* (king). Iyasu, who was eager to bestow such honours to his father, promoted Mikael to a higher rank without he himself had been crowned emperor. In the previous chapter, I have discussed that Ras Mikael was crowned king of Wollo and Tigray on 31 May 1914. A year after his coronation, in 1915, Iyasu added the provinces of Begemder and

⁶ F.O 401/11 Harrington to Gray, June 19, 1908

⁷ Solomon Gashaw, *Power Struggle in Addis Ababa . . .*, p. 51

Gojjam to the crown of Negus Mikael.⁸ We can clearly see this reality from written sources and also some books he provided to various churches. For instance, on a synaxarium he granted to the church of MedhaneAlem in Dessie it is written that “. . . ዝ መጽሐፍ ዘወሐቦ ሚካኤል ንጉሠ ወሎ ወትግሬ ወጎንደር ወጎጃም . . .” which literally means “This book is given by Mikael king of Wollo, Tigray, Gonder and Gojjam provinces. . . on the day of 5 April 1915”



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This appointment made Mikael king of almost half of the country. This further transformed his influence and also made him a powerful lord of the empire.

⁸ Addis Hiwot, *Ethiopia: form Autocracy to Revolution*. London: Review of. African Political Economy, 1975, p. 59; Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*. London: Pallmall Press, 1965, p. 105

In order to avoid any possible enmity that might occur between Negus Mikael and Ras Wolde Gorgis, the governor of Gonder province, due to the appointment of the later as king of almost half of Ethiopia, Iyasu made the later viceroy of Shewa and the Southern provinces. Leonard Mosley, Haile Sellassie . . ., p. 76



Map 5: Map showing the domain of Mikael, the Northern provinces of Wollo, Tigray, Gonder (Begemder) and Gojjam.

The coronation of Mikael as the king of Wollo and Tigray marked a dramatic shift of power from the province of Shewa, which was a center of the Ethiopian state by the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century to that of Wollo province, a former periphery. Consequently, the appointment of Mikael transformed Wollo from a buffer zone to a political center. But this development on Mikael's position is said to have created dissatisfaction among

the Shewan nobility. They considered Mikael's promotion together with Iyasu's designation as a threat to their political supremacy.⁹

The eminent Ethiopian historian, Bahru, remarked Iyasu's action of crowning his father as an act of discouraging the Shewan nobility. He wrote: "The undermining of the Shewan nobility reaches its climax with the coronation of Iyasu's father *Ras* Mikael as king of Wollo and Tigray, veritably as king of the north."¹⁰ The action is said to have created frustration among the Shewan nobility in that it would endanger Shewan supremacy within the inner Ethiopian power balance as they feared that the imperial crown might transfer to Wollo.

On the side of Wollo, the designation of his son, *Lij* Iyasu, as heir to the throne and his coronation as king further strengthened the political power of *Ras* Mikael. When *Ras Bitwaded* Tesema, the imperial regent, died in 1911, members of the Council of Ministers arranged the appointment of a replacement to the post, but Iyasu refused the appointment. Historians believe that the refusal resulted from his interest in being advised by his father rather than by any other personality.¹¹ Arnold Cipola, one of the few Europeans who interviewed *Lij* Iyasu mentioned that the other reason for Iyasu's refusal of a new regent was *Ras* Tessema's mishandling of the young prince. Iyasu told Cipola that he was virtually a prisoner of the palace, and so far, he knows only Addis Ababa. Iyasu explained his complaints that he had no liberty for laughing or

⁹ Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1974*. London: James Currey, 1991, p.125; Addis Hiwot, *Ethiopia: from Autocracy to Revolution* . . . , p.58; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* . . . , p. 230

¹⁰ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* . . . , p. 125

¹¹ Emeru Hayle-Selassie. "*Kayehut Kemastawsew* [From What I have seen and Recalled]". (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University press, 2001 E.C, p.55; Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II* . . . , p. 270)

talking with people without the permission of Tessema.¹² As a result, Iyasu favoured his father than any other advisor.

During the short reign of *Lij Iyasu*, *Negus Mikael* is said to have influenced many political and administrative decisions and was even considered by some as a power behind the throne. To mention few cases on Mikael's position, the attitude of the Italian, British, and French ambassadors towards him would suggest this. Ethiopian historian Solomon writes that the Italian ambassador proposed to his British and French colleagues to discuss the future of the country with Mikael. However, the discussions did not take place as pursuing this would have accorded the *Ras* ruler status.¹³ This shows how much Mikael held a key position in the administration of *Lij Iyasu*.

In addition to this, different domestic and foreign sources indicate Mikael's involvement in different governmental affairs. One such case was the appointment of *Qrqnazmach* Bayana as a foreign Minister in December 1914. When he was appointed, a letter approving his post was signed by *Ras Mikael*. Later, Foreign Minister Bayana would send governmental letters to *Negus Mikael*, placing him on an equal footing with Emperor Iyasu and foreign diplomats. This practice was unprecedented as no letters of this nature were ever addressed to any other noble of the empire.¹⁴ The British ambassador, Thesiger, mentioned *Negus Mikael* "the only one who has any

¹² Arnold Cipola, *Nell impero di Menelik*. Milano: Società editrice "La Grande attualità. (1911), p 110 Thesiger also reported that Ras Tessema lacked potency to combat the multifarious problems he faced. F.O 401/15, Thesiger to Grey, 2 December 1910

¹³ Wolbert G.C. Smidt, "The Foreign Politics of *Lij Iyasu* in 1915/16 According to newly discovered government papers," In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Trondheim: 2009, p.168; Solomon Gashaw, *Power Struggle in Addis Ababa 1906-1916*. . . , p.4.

¹⁴ Smidt, *The Foreign Politics of Lij Iyasu*, 2009 . . . , p. 168.

control of the prince”.¹⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that some of Iyasu’s political decisions were made on the advice of Mikael. It is even reported that he re-arranged some governmental issues based on the advice of his father. Iyasu is said to have made repeated visits to Dessie during his reign. It was reported by Gebre-Egziabher, Iyasu’s chronicler, that it was on one of his expeditions to the town in 1915 that Iyasu stayed with *Negus* Mikael for nearly a month and re-arranged some governmental issues based on the advice of his father.¹⁶

Furthermore, *Negus* Mikael was also able to establish strong relationships with some European countries especially Germany. Due to this reason, the German envoy Friedrich Hass was sent by his country to the Ethiopian government with the aim to win Ethiopia to the German side in the First World War. Though he was imprisoned in Eritrea, he mentioned that the letter he wishes to be sent to the Ethiopian leadership should be delivered to *Negus* Mikael.¹⁷ The issue of unifying Eritrea with Ethiopia, which is going to be discussed below is a good example.

Due to his central position in the state, some sources referred Mikael “a de facto co-regent”. In the words of Bahiru, “the man, who had started his political career as a minor Muslim chief, had thus become the most powerful figure in Ethiopia.”¹⁸

According to some sources, the aim of Iyasu’s empowering of Wollo in general and his father’s position was to establish a second power base in Dessie, the capital of Wollo. In relation to this, contemporary writers (sources) suggest that the power base by which Lij Iyasu relied on was not

¹⁵ Leonard Mosley, Haile-Selassie: The Conquering Lion . . . , p.74

¹⁶ Ibid, p.169; Gebre-Egziabher Elyas, *Prowess, Piety and Politics* . . . , p.332

¹⁷ Smidt, The Foreign Politics of *Lij* Iyasu , 2009, pp. 164&169.

¹⁸ Wolbert Smidt, “The Foreign Politics of Lij Iyasu 2009 p. 109; Bahru, A History of Modern Ethiopia . . . , p. 125

only the authority he inherited from Menilek but also the strength and fame of his father *Ras Mikael*. This was demonstrated in December 1911 during the attempted coup d'état on *Lij Iyasu*. *Ras Mikael* immediately went to Addis Ababa from his town, Dessie, with 8000 troops. Then, he discussed with the nobility, averted the coup, and stabilized the political situation. He imprisoned *Ras Abbate Buayalw*, the organizer and leader of the coup, and exiled him in Maqdala, where he stayed until the battle of Segele.¹⁹

The above pieces of evidence indicate Mikael's central position in the government of the time and how much he was involved and influenced the administration. Mikael's involvement had had its own negative consequences on his son and his own life; because the growing power of Mikael and his involvement in those various governmental affairs created grievance among the Shewan nobility.

Such actions of Iyasu initiated a period of renewed political intrigue which later characterized the political history of early twentieth century Ethiopia. Consequently, a question of "how a new legitimacy was about to be established in regions with Muslim majority" arouse.²⁰ However, the young prince continued to apply his own internal and external policies.

6.2 Some Aspects of the Short reign of *Lij Iyasu*

According to many historians the short period of *Lij Iyasu*'s rule was characterized by hope and despair, contradiction and inconsistency, and also a conflict of interests. The narrations written

¹⁹ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.121; Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II*, p. 256

²⁰ Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* . . . , p. 101, G.C. Wolbert Smidt, "The coronation of *Negus Mikael* in Däse in May 1914: A Photograph from the Nachlass Jensen and its Historical Back ground." *In Annales d'Ethiopie*.Vol.XVII, 2001, p. 361

on Lij Iyasu during the long reign of Emperor Haile-Sellasie (r. 1930-1974), his successor and political adversary, characterizes the prince as “incompetent ruler,” who “encouraged Islam” and was “chasing after women”. Such biased writings portrayed Iyasu as an apostate, guilty and of an impetuous and violent character. Among these authors, Asfa Yilma wrote:

The character of Lij Iyasu, like so many other things in Ethiopian history, is a puzzle hard to solve. Of his disgraceful conduct towards his dead grandfather there can be no question, nor is it easy to deduce any reasonable explanation. But it seems unlikely, in view of many tributes which have been paid to the prince’s charming disposition, that there was no reason whatever for his almost unforgettable actions.²¹

Leonard Mosley, who mentioned *Lij Iyasu* “the arrogant prince”, also composed

. . . In his lifetime he was a shabby tyrant with hardly a discoverable virtue. Between 1911 and 1916 he broke up the Empire which Menelik had painfully put together and brought Ethiopia to a state of chaos in which she was all but taken over by colonial powers. . . What a pity he dabbled with Islam and had such vandal advisers; he might otherwise have made a great emperor?²²

In such narrations written by the winners, the illustration given to Iyasu is extremely adverse. When the American sociologist, Donald Levine collected material for his book *Wax and Gold* in Addis Ababa in the 1960s, he displayed questionnaires in Addis Ababa. In one of his

²¹ Asfa Yilma, *Haile Sellassie: Emperor of Ethiopia*. London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co. Ltd, 1936, p. 123

²² Leonard Mosley, *The Conquering Lion* . . . , p. 69

questionnaires, he asked the most and the least popular historical personalities. According to the results of the survey, the most negative historical personality was *Lij Iyasu*.²³

Nevertheless, recent findings and publications on the young prince show that Iyasu was a progressive leader who transformed various socio-economic and political conditions in the empire.²⁴ One of these historians who examined Iyasu's period of rule from a different perspective, Ahmed Hassen, explicates "The reign of *Lij Iyasu* (1910-1916) was short but eventful. Although short, his reign was characterized, for a careful observer, by chains of incidents such as elements of social progress, factual disinformation, political treachery" Taking the social, economic and political progresses Iyasu took, Ahmed regarded Iyasu a "Reformer".²⁵

Similarly, the leading historians specialized on the history of early twentieth century Ethiopia, have assertively considered Iyasu's efforts as progressive. Among such historians, Bahru Zewde forwarded a detailed account on Iyasu's reforms and progressive measures. In his book, *the History of modern Ethiopia* he marked:

In addition to the guaranteeing of property and a more equitable system of Asrat collection...he put to the quragna system, whereby the plaintiff was chained to the

²³ Zuzanna Augustyniak, "Lij Iyasu's Marriages as a Reflection of his Domestic Policy", In *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia: New Insights*, Éloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (Eds.), Northeast African History, Orality and Heritage, Zurich. 2014, p.39

²⁴ After 1991, for example, two important texts were published, which marked a change of perspective, the Chronicle of Zewditu and Iyasu (edited by Molvaer in 1994), and the historical essay by Gobeze Taffete (which is published in Amharic by the French Centre for Ethiopian Studies in 1996), followed by the publication of further sources. Richard Pankhurst, "Economic and Social Innovation during the last Years of Emperor Menilek's Life and the short Reign of Lij Iyasu," In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Trondheim: 2009), Vol.1, p.137.

²⁵ Ahmed Hassen Omer, "Lij Iyasu: A Reformist Prince?", In: *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia: New Insights*, Éloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (Eds.), Northeast African History, Orality and Heritage, Zurich. 2014, p. 82

*defendant and the creditor to the debtor until justice was delivered. He also tried to mitigate the abuses of the lebashay, a whimsical traditional mode of detection of criminals, in which a young boy would be given a powerful drug and let loose in the neighbourhood; the unfortunate owner of the house where the boy finally collapsed would be declared the culprit.*²⁶

Among all the reforms Iyasu made, the most important matter was his attitude towards Islam and Muslims of Ethiopia. It was this action that latter costed his life and that affected the status of Wollo in Ethiopian historiography.

New insights on the period of Iyasu show that he was a progressive leader who attempted to redress past injustices towards the different religious and ethnic groups. Especially he is said to have given an autonomous right to Ethiopian Muslims.²⁷ Iyasu's religious policy towards Ethiopian Muslims was an entirely new approach in its kind. He had had a different attitude to religious matters from the previous Ethiopian emperors. Extending the secularist attitude of his grandfather, Menilek, Iyasu tried to equally treat followers of the two country's main religions, Christianity and Islam. Unlike his predecessors who forced Muslims to convert to Christianity, Iyasu rather built mosques at Harrar, Jijiga and Dire Dawa. In these towns, Iyasu was even reported to have said attended prayers in the mosque wearing Muslim dresses, which a strange practice is never done by former emperors.²⁸ Regarding Iyasu's attitude towards Muslims, Avedis Terzian, son of Emperor Menelik's Armenian adviser, the entrepreneur Sarkis Terzian,

²⁶ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* . . . , pp. 121-122

²⁷ Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II.* . . , p. 252

²⁸ Mahteme Selassie Weld -Mesqel, "Zekre-Neger" [Memorial of Events]. Addis Ababa : 1962 E.C p. 534; FO 371/2595 Thesiger to Grey, 30 September 1916

witnessed that the prince on one occasion told his father that he considered himself “emperor of all Ethiopians, regardless of religion” and encouraged Islam.²⁹

I claim that the flexibility of Iyasu on religious matters resulted from his background. Firstly, he was born from a Muslim family on his father’s side.³⁰ Secondly, he was born and spent his childhood time in Wollo, a province where Muslims and Christians had co-existed for centuries, a province where Christians and Muslims marry each other regardless of their religious difference, a province where Christians and Muslims live intermixed.

As part of appeasement of his policy towards Muslims, *Lij* Iyasu had made repeated official visits towards the Muslim-dominated provinces of Eastern Ethiopia. His chronicle mentions that at one of his visits to the region, he summoned all Muslim sheikhs and tribal chiefs at Harar where he made the following speech.

Though we differ in religion and tribe, I would wish in your hearts to be united by a nationalistic sentiment. My strongest desire is that all natives of Ethiopia should be of one heart and watch the country's frontiers even if we differ in respect of religion. I hope your cooperation with the rest of your Ethiopian brothers will keep your country united and her frontiers secure.³¹

²⁹ Richard Pankhurst, “The Reign of Lij Iyasu – as Avedis Terzian Saw it”, In *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia: New Insights*, Éloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (Eds.), Northeast African History, Orality and Heritage, Zurich. 2014, p. 91

³⁰ Though Mikael was converted to Christianity at the age of thirty, he was formerly Muslim and his background was Muslim too.

³¹ Gebre-Egziabher, *The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu* . . . , p. 59 and 352

Hence, his short-term reign over the vast lands of Ethiopia is characterized by advocating equality between Ethiopian Muslims with Christians and peoples of the periphery with the center. As a result, emergent scholars mention *Lij Iyasu* as “a rare example in Ethiopian history that, as an Emperor, created an atmosphere which today we would call civil society, social equality, or religious equality.”³²

Moreover, *Lij Iyasu* is said to have been a leader who had a passion for keeping the integrity of Ethiopia and protecting Ethiopia’s interests against foreign powers. In his attempt to consolidate his power and unify Ethiopia, Iyasu adopted two political steps. The first was visiting the different provinces, especially coastal regions of the Empire aimed at assuring the allegiance of the different chiefs and governors. The other step was arranging political marriages with the families of the most important Muslim chiefs in the empire.³³

Unluckily, the period where Iyasu came to power was a time when Colonization of Africa was on progress. Thus, as his grandfather, Menelik, secured the independence of Ethiopia, Iyasu too concentrated on defending the boundaries of the country. As contemporary sources indicate,

³² Jan Záhorký, *Iyasu V of Ethiopia (1913–1916): perilous traitor or a true modernizer?* Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen <https://dspace5.zcu.cz/bitstream/11025/11847/1/Zahorik.pdf> p.125

³³ Abiy Demissie, “*Lij Iyasu: A Prespective Study of His Short Reign*”. BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1964, p. 4. Of course, it was customary to Ethiopian rulers prior to Iyasu to visit their different chiefs so as to make sure of their loyalty. It was also art of their policies to stay for a considerable time in different parts of the empire. What makes Iyasu’s case different was his marriage with the daughters of Muslim chieftains. Although legally married to Seble Wongel Hailu, daughter of *Ras Hailu Tekle Haimanot* of Gojjam, *Lij Iyasu* had numerous secondary wives, concubines and liaisons with a variety of high born and commoner, and Christian and Muslim women in violation of the tenents of the Orthodox Church. He married the daughters of several Danakil and *Galla* chiefs, and betrothed himself to the daughter of *Aba Jiffar*, King of Jimma, the most powerful Moslem prince in the empire.

Iyasu's attention unlike Menelik, was mainly focused on the coastal areas. He was preoccupied with the idea of annexing the coastal areas which were under Italy, France and Britain.³⁴

In addition to this, studies on the internal and foreign policies of the young prince have shown that *Lij* Iyasu had a great ambition to reunify Eritrea with Ethiopia and also let Ethiopia have access to the sea. He is also said to have had a wish to incorporate Djibouti and Somalia to the empire.³⁵

This is evident from his own words in the following quote: “. . . አባቴን ንጉሥ ሳለሰኝ ፈረሴን ከቀይ ባሕር ውሃ ሳለጠጣ ዘውድ ጭኝ ንጉሥ ነገሥት አልባልም. . . ” *I will never be crowned as emperor before I make my horse drink from the water of the Red Sea*”, clearly states his intention.³⁶

Negus Mikael, on his part, is said to have prepared for a campaign in support of his son's ambition to return Eritrea to the empire. One of the different factors which initiated Mikael was the diversion of the Red Sea trade towards Hararge. After the completion of the Djibouti-Addis Abbaba railway, the majority of the country's trade route was diverted towards this direction.

³⁴ Jan Záhorský, *Iyasu V of Ethiopia*, p. 130; Abiy, *Lij Iyasu: A Prespective Study of His Short Reign*, p.4; Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: Ye Zeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922*. [The Turn of the 20th Century: My memory from What I Saw and Heard] Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C, p. 121; Gebre-Egziabher, *The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu* . . . , p. 335. It is reported that While Iyasu was attending a tea party invitation at British embassy in Addis Ababa, he is said to have clearly asked the consul for the withdrawal of Britain from the frontiers of Ethiopia.

³⁵ Arka Abota, “Ethiopia's Foreign Policy under Emperor Hayle-Selassé I: An Appraisal,” MA Thesis (Addis Ababa University: Department of Political Science and International Relation, 2002), p.20; H.Wilhelm Lockot *The Mission: The Life, Reign and Character of Haylä SelassieI*, (London: Hurst&Company.1989), p.9.

³⁶ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.113; Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1996), p.57.

This affected trade routes which moved across Wollo. Mikael, who was well aware of the value of a borderland province initiated to get access to the Red seaports.³⁷

In January 1915, *Lij* Iyasu and *Negus* Mikael sat for several days in discussion in Dessie. Their central agenda was focused on preparing a campaign to subdue the Italian enclave to the north. A plan was set, and responsibilities were divided between the two: organizing the Northern Provinces was given to *Negus* Mikael, while coordinating the areas of Harar, Jijiga and Ethiopian Somalia was in the hands of Iyasu.³⁸

Negus Mikael summoned his army at his court and made the following speech:

“... ከእንግዲህ ወዲህ የዮሐንስን ምድር ኤርትራን ከመሞቴ በፊት ማስመለስ አለብኝ፡፡ ሹማምንትና ወታደሮች ሆይ ፈረሶቻችሁንና በቅሎዎቻችሁን ጫኑ፡፡ መሣሪያችሁን ወልውሉ ስንቃችሁንም አዘጋጁ...”

*Hereafter, I shall get back the land of Yohannes, Eritrea, before my death. My appointees and soldiers let you make ready your horses and mules and prepare your weapons and food.*³⁹

For this purpose, a significant number of weapons were imported from Austria and distributed around Dessie. The German diplomat, Lorenz Jensen, who resided at the court of Mikael in Dessie at the time, witnessed a military preparation in Wollo.⁴⁰

³⁷ One of the reasons that pushed Mikael to prepare an invasion of the territory was the diversion of the lucrative Red Sea trade away from Wollo towards the Eastern province of Hararge. The construction of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway in the first decade of the twentieth century, diverted the majority of the country's trade, affecting traditional trade routes crossing Wollo. Mikael was well aware of the value of Eritrea and its port Massawa which was best accessed through Wollo. Barnes Cedric, "Provinces and Princes: Power and the Eastern Ethiopian Periphery 1906-1916," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.XXXIV, No.2. December, 2001, p.108

³⁸ Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*. . . , pp.77-79, Informants: Ato Samuel Mesganaw and Ato Molla Yeshaw.

³⁹ Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*. . . , p.80; Informants: Ato Samuel Mesganaw and Ato Tesfaye Amede.

A month after, in February 1915, *Lij* Iyasu ordered the pioneer war generals, *Ras* Yimer, *Ras* Welde-Giorgis and *Wagshum* Gebre-Hiwot to cross the Mereb river⁴¹ and invade Eritrea.⁴² In addition to the above preparation, a diplomatic agreement was concluded with Germany. The Germans who needed Ethiopian friendship in the First World War welcomed the relationship between the two countries. At Jijiga, Iyasu won the diplomatic support of the Harari, Oromos, Somalis and Afars. Moreover, he established friendly cooperation with Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan, theso called Mad Mullah, the anti-British colonial resistance leader in Somalia.⁴³ But it was when Iyasu was at Jijiga, that a coup was organized against him by the Shewan nobility. Thus, the attention of the young prince and his father was averted. The campaign to subdue Eritrea was aborted.

Such activities of Iyasu as his engagements against Italy and his support to Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan, the Somalian anti-colonial resistance leader led to hostilities with the adjacent colonial powers particularly Italy, Britain and France. Accordingly, he saw the advantage of befriending Germany who had no colonies in the Red Sea area, and who could, therefore, be used to check the growing influence of Britain, France and Italy and in the Ethiopian region and the Horn. The Germans, as they had seen a place of strategic importance for their campaign against the British possessions in East Africa, welcomed the friendship between the two countries.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Wolbert Smidt, The coronation of *Negus* Mikael. . . , p. 363. Smidt, who worked on the Jensen journals explained that the diplomat's presence in Dessie at the court of *Negus* Mikael in 1915 was to influence the Ethiopian leadership to take the side of the central European powers in the First World War) Jensen's task appeared to be accomplished with considerable

⁴¹ Mereb river is the natural boundary of Ethiopia and Eritrea

⁴² *Lij* Eyasu Michael, Emperor-Designate (Eyasu V), www.angelfire.com/ny/ethiocrown/lij.html. Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, p.78; Barnes Cedric, *Provinces and Princes*. . . , p.112

⁴⁴ Slomon Gashaw, *Power Struggle in Addis Ababa*. . . , p. 57; Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.124 Arka Abota, *Ethiopia's Foreign Policy under Emperor Haylä-Selassé*, p. 21

As part of the aspect of his period of rule, the attitude of Iyasu towards the high-ranking ministers and chiefs of the empire, the Shewan nobility was somewhat undesirable. He is said to have lacked the wisdom to create a strong tie with them. Rather, by 1915 Iyasu had replaced many of Menilek's courtiers with his own appointees arrogantly saying: "When I set out with young men... to subdue areas not under effective government, you should not have followed me. . . . You cannot run as fast as us. You have grown fat. You are fat, old and useless."⁴⁵ But the wisdom of ruling a country was with the old. I contemplate that Iyasu committed a mistake in this regard. Because later on these circumstances created grievance among the old members of the nobility and further widened and deepened their discontent against him.

As discussed above, the short reign of *Lij* Iyasu was mainly characterized by administrative inefficiency and personal weaknesses on the one hand and progressive reforms on the other hand. Among others, his special attention for the Ethiopian Muslims and his ambition to keep the integrity of the country are the major aspects of his administration. But, internally his attitude towards Muslims and internationally his approach towards the three colonial powers were not favored by the Shewan nobility and also the adjacent colonial powers respectively. As a result, these efforts of Iyasu were seen as a threat against the Christian empire. All his actions his attachment with Islam, his approach towards the nobles of his grandfather, his relations with Germany and Turkey and the like, caused considerable dissatisfaction among the Shewan nobility and the Christian population.⁴⁶ Lastly, due to the above developments, a wide range of opposition rose against him.

⁴⁵ Gebre-Egziabher, *The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu* . . . , p.327; L. Mosley, *Haile Selassé: The Conquering Lion* . . . , p.120.

⁴⁶ Barnes Cedric, *Provinces and Princes* . . . , p. 108; Wolbert Smidt, "The coronation of *Negus* Mikael. . . , p. 362.

6.3 Opposition against Lij Iyasu

From the beginning to the end, Iyasu's short reign was marked by uncertainties, challenges and oppositions both internally and externally. His administrative styles and reforms clashed with the interest of his grandfather's conservative ministers. The totality of his actions, his repeated insult against the nobles of his grandfather, his relations with Germany and Turkey, his extended absence from the capital caused considerable dissatisfaction among the Shewan nobility. Due to such reasons, Iyasu lacked recognition among the old Shewan nobility. In the eyes of his contenders, this made him "unsuitable for the position he had assumed".⁴⁷

Among all other factors, the most accusation levelled against Iyasu was his affiliation with Islam and his giving autonomous rights for Ethiopian Muslims. He was even accused of converting to Islam. His opponents outlined the following ten points as proofs of Iyasu's conversion to Islam.

- 1) *He married four wives claiming: 'the Qur'an permits it to me.'*
- 2) *He built a mosque at Jijjiga with government funds and gave it to Muslims.*
- 3) *At the time he sent to Mahazar Bey ... our Ethiopian flag ... on which he had caused to be written the following words (in Arabic): 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.'*
- 4) *He wore Somali Muslim clothes and the Muslim turban, held the Islamic rosary, and was seen to prostrate himself in the mosque.*

⁴⁷ Éloi Ficquet, *Understanding Lij Iyasu through his Forefathers*. . . , p. 1; Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo*. . . , p. 54 Lij Iyasu is said to have shown a pronounced lack of interest in the everyday miscellaneous government affairs and was on long sojourns in the country.

5) *He was seen praying and reading the Qur'an having had it transcribed in Amharic characters.*

6) *On the headgear of his special guards he had embroidered the legend 'there is no other god but Allah'.*

7) *Ras Makonnen⁴⁸ had built a church at Harar and had made the area adjoining the church into a dwelling for the clergy; giving the Muslims a place in exchange; then, 32 years later, he (Lij Iyasu) expelled the clergy and restored it to the Muslims.*

8) *When a girl was born to him he saw to it that she would grow up learning the Muslim religion and he gave her to the Muslim Madame Hanafi and said: 'Bring her upon my behalf.'*

9) *He despised the descent of Menilek II, which comes direct from Menilek I, and claimed to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad; assembling the great Muslim sheikhs, he spent the day convincing them of his genealogical calculations.*

10) *The day on which our great king, Emperor Menilek [...] died, instead of mourning and of arranging lamentations, he went out horse-riding to Jan-Meda and spent the day playing combat-games".⁴⁹*

Iyasu's attachment with the Muslim population is said to have dismayed and annoyed the nobility of Shewa and the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church who feared that he might turn Ethiopia to a Muslim state. Consequently, a wide range of propaganda on *Lij Iyasu* had been disseminated among the Christian population of the empire. So far, some writers inform that a British colonel T.E. Lawrence arrived in Ethiopia and was involved in the production of

⁴⁸ Ras Mekonnen was the governor of the eastern province of Harar and the father of Ras Teferi, the later Emperor Haile-Sellassie

⁴⁹ Haile Selassie I (Edward Ullendorff transl. and ed.), *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892–1937*. London: Oxford University Press. 1976, pp. 48–49). Jan Záhorký, *Iyasu V of Ethiopia (1913–1916)* . . . , p. 129

propaganda against Iyasu.⁵⁰ According to informants and existing written sources, the propaganda was not only against Iyasu but also against Muslims and also Wollo, the region where the prince came from.⁵¹

As a result, the image of “Iyasu as an enemy of Ethiopian Christianity” was created during and after his reign. Being confused by such propagandas on Iyasu, a section of the Christian population who doubted his religious conviction expressed their emotion by such couplets:

ኢየሱስ ኢየሱስ ኢየሱስ ዘመዴ

እንዴት ብዬ ልስማህ በየትኛው ሆዴ

ለካስ ዉስጥ ዉስጡን መሐመድ ነህ እንዴ

Iyasu! Iyasu, Iyasu my close relative,

I am not easily convinced, cannot stomach the gossip against you,

Have you really secretly become “Mohammedan”?

In the couplet, they expressed their confusion by what was proliferated against him and that they doubted him for conversion to Islam. In addition to this, such hideous poems were composed by anti Iyasu coalition to encounter against him.

ኢየሱስ መሀመድ

አልጋ ሲሉት አመድ

Iyyassu “Muhammad”

Preferred the dust to the throne⁵²

⁵⁰ Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* . . . , p. 106

⁵¹ Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo*. . . , p. 63

Such Verses were articulated to crush Iyasu's Christian public support by labelling him as a "Muslim" even though he was not. Hence, the propaganda on Lij Iyasu considerably alienated him from his Christian subjects. These perceptions of 'Iyasu as a Muslim' not only affected his life but also the political life of Wollo as a whole. The advertising which labelled Iyasu as a Muslim recalls the status given to Wollo during the eighteenth and nineteenth century narrations.

Here a question "Was really Iyasu converted to Islam?" may arise. Different sources written by both anti Iyasu and pro Iyasu writers forwarded different perceptions on the matter. Many of the pieces of literature written during and after his reign by his adversaries, the winners, inform that Iyasu had converted to Islam. One of such antagonistic narrations is written by Asfa Yilama. By referring his background as a son of a convert Muslim noble from Wollo, Asfa suggests that the movement of Iyasu was absolutely conversion. She boldly stressed: "Perhaps the clue to all these strange happenings lies in the fact that he had from his father, a strong strain of Wollo *Galla* blood in his veins. This made him always turn towards the teaching of the prophet [Mohammed], for the *Gallas* have maintained the faith of Islam."⁵³

The evidence Asfa provides is the background of his father as a Muslim Imam. Of course, the father of *Lij* Iyasu, Negus Mikael was one of the two last *Imams* of the *Mammedoch* dynasty, under the name of Muhammad Ali, until he was baptized with the name of Mikael. However, in the previous chapter, I have discussed how Mikael was a devoted Christian though he was a

⁵² Ahmed Hassen Omer, "The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916: Different Perceptions". *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 46 (December, 2013), p. 112; Informants: Ato Solomon Addisu and Ato Iyasu Mekonnen

⁵³ Asfa Yilma, *Haile Sellassie: Emperor of Ethiopia*. . . , p. 123

converted Muslim. Accordingly, while the father was a devoted Christian, the suspicion that “his son [Iyasu] would turn towards the teaching of Islam” seems a prejudiced judgment.

In addition to Asfa, The British Ambassador in Addis Ababa, who was working together with the opponents of Iyasu, Thesiger stated:

I am coming to the opinion that the heir of the throne of Solomon is at heart a Muslim and is entertaining dreams of one day putting himself at the head of the Mohammedan Abyssinians, who considerably outnumber the Abyssinian Christians, and of proclaiming a Moslem kingdom which will stretch far beyond the frontiers of the present empire.⁵⁴

In addition to such descriptions, the official Ethiopian historiography, as was established during the Haile Selassie period, portrayed *Lij* Iyasu as almost a traitor to the Solomonic dynasty and the Empire. On the other hand, recent professional insights that carefully examined the administration of Iyasu, suggests that he was never converted to Islam rather he provided extraordinary privileges to Muslims. For instance, Bahru Zewde, viewed Iyasu’s actions as a measure to redress past injustices on Muslims. He underlined:

In actual fact, however, as both Ethiopian and foreign sources increasingly make clear, Iyasu had no intention of disestablishing Orthodox Christianity in favor of Islam. Confused as it certainly was, his policy can be interpreted as one of trying

⁵⁴ FO 371/2228, Thesiger to Grey, 31 March 1915. Andrew Caplan, “British Policy Towards Ethiopia, 1909 to 1919”. PhD Dissertation, University of Londo, 1971 p.167

to redress injustices of the past, of the Muslims feel at home in their own country. In this, he represented a revolutionary departure from the past. Tewodros, a man of wide vision in every respect, was bigoted when it came to Muslims, particularly the Muslims of Wollo. Yohannes, liberal and almost federal in his politics, was even more uncompromising on the question of Orthodoxy and Christianity. Menelik, builder of the largest empire Ethiopia has never seen, did little to integrate the heterogeneous entity into one nation. Iyasu's religious policy was the first major attempt to tackle the question of national integration, a question which has not been satisfactorily solved to this day.⁵⁵

Indeed, written and oral sources realized that more than any other emperor before or after him, *Lij* Iyasu favored Islam. However, a reassessment of *Lij* Iyasu's reign implies that his support of the Muslim inhabitants Ethiopia, and his marriages to the daughters of Muslim chiefs was a tool for the accomplishment of an internal policy aimed at achieving his strategy of uniting the various peoples of Ethiopia.⁵⁶

With regard to this, Richard Pankhurst, who researched more on the history of twentieth century Ethiopia, perceived Iyasu's intention as an act of executing justice. He composed:

⁵⁵ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*. . . , p, 124

This reminds us Akbar (1556-1605), who was regarded as the great ruler of Mughal Empire in India, and whose strategies were rejected by the Muslims of India due to religious matters. Ezad Azraai Jamsari and etal, Akbar (1556-1605) and India unification under the Mughals, International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCET) Volume 8, Issue 12, 2017, p. 768-771

⁵⁶ Zuzanna Augustyniak, *Lij Iyasu's Marriages as a Reflection of his Domestic Policy*. . . , p. 39

Iyasu actively attempted to accommodate both faiths. As a Christian, he attended Church services, founded the church of Madhane Alam at Qachane, in Addis Ababa, and inaugurated that of St. George, also in the capital. On the other hand, he also built a mosque, at Harar, and toured the Muslim provinces, where he consorted with Muslim chiefs, and too often, critics complained, with their nubile daughters. His visits to the Muslim periphery also displeased the country's Christian establishment. The nobles of Shewa did not take kindly to the young man's attitude and policies.⁵⁷

To add one more proof from the pro Iyasu writings, opposing to Asfa Yilma's idea on Iyasu's conversion in association with his background as the son of a Muslim chief, Mosley debated "Though he was born a Muslim, *Ras Mikael* never gave any sign of regretting to his former religion".⁵⁸

Actually, no documents of his government show any sign of conversion of Iyasu. When I examine the writings of the contemporaries of the prince, who were his close friends but later his opponents such as, Mersea Hazen, *Ras Emeru* and *Tekele Hawariyat*, none of them confirm Iyasu's conversion.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it was reported that Iyasu once told Ydlibi that he had not

⁵⁷ Richard Pankhurst, *A History of Twentieth Century Ethiopia*, The Pankhurst History Library, [Online Library] (pp. 59-60), <https://www.linkethiopia.org/ethiopia/learn-about-ethiopia/pankhurst-history-library/> Accessed 05 January 2019.

Gebre Egziabher had reported that while Iyasu was in Wollo in 1913 to settle religious disputes between Muslims and Christians, he did not show indifference during the course of the procedure of the case. He even stood more on the side of the Christians, as blamed the Muslims for having raised such a conflict. Such facts show that he did not blindly support Muslims as his opponents criticized him. (p. 59)

⁵⁸ Leonard Mosley, Haile Selassie: *Coquering Lion* . . , p. 77

⁵⁹ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: Ye Zeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922*. [*The Turn of the 20th Century: My memory from What I Saw and Heard*] Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C; Emeru Hayle-Selassie. "*Kayehut Kemastawsew* [From What I saw and

converted to Islam. Yidlibi quotes Iyasu as saying to him: “I have not changed my faith. I would never think of doing so. It is perhaps true that when I am in the country of Muslim subjects I might favour them, but I do the same to the Oromos when I am in their country.”⁶⁰ They are all my subjects and I believe they are each entitled to every mark of favour in equal shares, be they Christian, Muslim or even heathen”.⁶¹

Thus, all the convictions on Iyasu’s conversion seem not to be genuine but fabricated to remove the young prince from power. For the Shewan nobility, the opponents of Iyasu, blaming him on his Islamic affiliation is an ideal reason in order to win the support of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and its followers who were very conservative and ardent in regard to their religion. Accordingly, it seems that the real motive of the opposition is not Iyasu’s conversion to Islam and “Saving the Empire from Islam . . .” Instead, the matter was a power rivalry to keep the supremacy of Shewa province in the Ethiopian twentieth century power politics.

The seat and center of the Ethiopian empire had been changed to different sites due to various reasons, mostly political. During the medieval period, the seat was in Shewa and Bete Amhara⁶² till it was moved to Gonder due to religious and ethnic encounters of the sixteenth century. Under emperor Yohannes, (r. 1872-1889) it was further moved to Tigray. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the center of the empire had shifted from north back to the province of

Recalled]”. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University press, 2001 E.C.; Tekle -Hawaryat Tekele Mariam (Fitwarari). *My Autobiography*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press (1998 E.C.)

⁶⁰ Here the term ‘country’ implies region.

⁶¹ May Yidlibi, (ed. Bahru Zewde), *With Ethiopian Ruler: A Biography of Hasib Ydlibi*, Addis Ababa University Press, Addis Ababa, 2006, p. 250.

⁶² For instance, among the most known emperors, Amde- Sion (1314-1344) and Zera-Yacob (1434-1468) administered from Shewa. Emperors Naod (1494-1508) and Lebne-Dingel (1508-1540) ruled from Bete-Amhara

Shewa. Following the coronation of Emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913), the political power and also the center of the government had taken by the Shewan nobility.⁶³

So, the Shewan nobility who were discontented by the appointment of Mikael and the growing power of Wollo, and who suspected of a further shift of power from Shewa to Wollo had to struggle to keep the political supremacy in their own hand. As a result, as evidences and informants shown, it can be concluded that the dispute was a political rivalry to keep power and legitimacy.⁶⁴

Ahmed Hassen forwarded two factors that initiated conspiracies against Iyasu; the appointment of his father as king and his foreign policy as a pro Germany and Pro Turkey, during the first world war.⁶⁵

Finally, the Shewan nobility, who had grievances on Lij Iyasu's religious policy, and who had also some personal objections against him were determined to overthrow the young prince from power. Thesiger, who was following up the then political situations in the country, reported his doubt that plans were being discussed by the Shewan senior nobles to remove Iyasu from the throne.⁶⁶

6. 4 The Deposition of *Lij* Iyasu: The Road to the Battle of Segelle

As I discussed in the previous section, Iyasu faced opposition from the old Shewan nobilities mainly due to religious and dynastic issues. It was reported that a debate to depose Iyasu had

⁶³ Harold Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, University of California Press, 1994, p.77; Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*. . . , p.74

⁶⁴ Wolbert G.C. Smidt, "The coronation of Negus Mika'él , King of Wollo and Tegray, in May 1914: New findings". In: *Annales d'Ethiopie*. Volume 23, 2007, p. 431

⁶⁵ Ahmed Hassen Omer, "The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916. . . , p. 104

⁶⁶ Abiy Demissie, "Lij Iyasu: A Prespective Study of His Short Reign. . . , p. 23 FO 371/2593, Thesiger to Grey

started early in 1916. Existing sources on the overthrow of *Lij* Iyasu described that in the first week of August 1916, the conspirators called two meetings to discuss and decide what to be done on the prince. In his account, Terizan, confers that the conspirators in their discussion argued that *Lij* Iyasu was a danger for the Shewan chiefs themselves and even for the Allies (Allied powers), the neighboring colonial powers. Finally, the conspirators agreed to dethrone him and enthrone princess Zewuditu, Menelik's daughter.⁶⁷

Having this decision, the chieftains approached the most influential person, the bishop, Abuna Methewos and said to him, "Iyasu insulted the Holy Church and that he had plotted against the lives of the Christian subjects. He has become a Muslim; he has abandoned the Faith and is behaving in an improper manner. You must dethrone him".⁶⁸

Still, the main charge levelled against him was apostasy and conversion to Islam, the religion of his paternal ancestors. They even described the intrigue to depose Iyasu as the "removal of a Muslim prince from a Christian throne".⁶⁹

Similarly; narrations written following his deposition continue to explain that the fall of *Lij* Iyasu was caused by his conversion to Islam. Historians like Mahteme Sellassie, Gebre Egziabher, David Mathew and Asfa Yilma conveyed the idea that Iyasu's failure was caused by his inclination to Islam.⁷⁰ But as I detailed earlier, the scheme was a coup de tat to keep the priority

⁶⁷ Andrew Caplan, *British Policy Towards Ethiopia . . .*, p. 217 Richard Pankhurst, *The Reign of Lij Iyasu – as Avedis Terzian Saw it . . .*, pp. 96-97

⁶⁸ Asfa Yilma, *Haile Sellassie: Emperor of Ethiopia. . .*, p. 126

⁶⁹ Haggai Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, CO 80301 USA, 2010, p. 5

⁷⁰ Mahteme Selassie Wäldä -Mesqel, "Zekre-Neger" [Memorial of Events]. Addis Ababa : 1962 E.C ; Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, Oxford Univeristy Press, 1948; Asfa Yilma, *Haile Sellassie: Emperor of Ethiopia*. London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co. Ltd, 1936; Gebre-Egziabher Elyas (trans. & ed. Reidulf,

of Shewa. Amongst the most recent writers, Ahmed, underlined “The 1916 coup was nothing but a sort of coup d’état which blamed *Lij* Iyasu not so much for his incompetent rule as for his radical departure from established mores. It was, instead, a plot which was hatched with in the womb of the Ethiopian feudal system, which then fabricated ‘evidences’ to justify its action by deeply questioning the religious identity of the young prince.”⁷¹ Besides, Ahmed forwarded two reasons factors that initiated conspiracies against Iyasu; the appointment of his father and his foreign policy as a pro Germany and Pro Turkey, during the first world war period.

But when they decided to depose Iyasu under the pretext of conversion to Islam, the Shewan nobility conferred not to use any argument based on the idea of Shewan supremacy. Instead, they agreed to use “Iyasu’s apostasy and betraying of the Christian faith” as a basis of their antagonism.⁷²

In this conspiracy to depose Iyasu, the neighbouring colonial powers (France, Great Britain and Italy), are said to have collaborated with the Shewan nobility. The three powers, who were concerned about *Lij* Iyasu’s foreign policy and his provision of support for the Somali nationalist Muhammad Abdulle Hassan, worked with the Shewan nobility in preparing the ground for the down fall of the prince. The Allies determined that Iyasu was a threat and should be removed forthwith. To this effect, the Allied powers’ legations in Addis Ababa began to work closely with his enemies.⁷³

Molvaer), *Prowess, Piety and Politics. The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia 1909-193*, (Köln: 1994)

⁷¹ Ahmed Hassen Omer, The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916: Different Perceptions. . . , pp. 104 & 117

⁷² Wolbert Smidt, The coronation of Nāgus Mikael in Desse . . . , P. 368

⁷³ Arka Abota, Ethiopia’s Foreign Policy under Emperor Haile-Selassie. . . , p. 21 Ahmed Hassen Omer, The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916 . . . , p. 108 As mentioned in the previous section, Iyasu had been rendering material

This can be considered as an impact of colonialism on Ethiopia's internal politics. Though Ethiopia is the only African country that has never been colonized, in one or the other way colonialism affected its politics and territorial dominions.

While Iyasu was on an official visit in Harar, the eastern province of the country, the Shewan chiefs in the council of ministers decided to remove him from power.⁷⁴ A proclamation which was secretly composed by the plotters was read out to the public on 27 September 1916, during the national Christian holiday of *Masqal*, the Holy Cross.

The chronicler, Gebre-Egziabher, details the proclamation. Part of it reads:

Honourable Notables!

- 1. The oppression done against us and the government by Lij Iyasu from the time he became Crown Prince cannot be put into words. When his grandfather, Emperor Menelik, appointed him his heir, we also accepted Iyasu on oath, and Menelik's plea. We thought with time he will grow in knowledge and he will be checked by our advice; and we have waited until now, saying: "Let us be patient with him." But he, in addition to going from bad to worse, refused to be checked [by advice]. You all know how he humiliated and put in prison without any fault the notables whom his majesty Emperor Menelik had honored and appointed to high rank and kept in honor and high offices.*
- 2. For the father who leaves taxable land as an inheritance, the son [who inherits his land] will hold a mass [i.e. pay for a mass to be held for the dead father]; but he [Iyasu, to the*

and moral support to Sayyid Mahammed Abdille Hasan, the Somali patriotic leader who was fighting British and Italian colonialism by sending him arms and ammunition

⁷⁴ Leonard Mosley, Haile Selassie. . . , p.86; Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, pp.93-94.

contrary], when a father as great as emperor Menelik left him [Iyasu] his kingdom, he [Iyasu] spent the day playing spear throwing from horse back when he [Menelik] died instead of holding a mass for him, as custom and decency demanded.

3. *Lij Iyasu went to Harar and entered a mosque of the Muslims and put on the wrap of the Muslims and worshiped together with the Muslims, and he slaughtered a camel and forced the Christians to eat at a banquet together with the Muslims. . .*
4. *It had been decreed [by the Ethiopian church] for all Christians, [and] even for kings [that there should be] one woman [only one wife] for one man. But Lij Iyasu married many women, without distinguishing between Muslims and Christians . . . Therefore, what we announce to you is that we decided to place Emperor Menelik's daughter Woizaro Zewuditu, on her father's throne as Empress of Ethiopia. The descendant of Sahle-Sellassie, the son of Ras Mekonen, Dejazmatch Teferi, we have appointed and made him Crown Prince.*⁷⁵

The proclamation of September was not only against *Lij Iyasu* but also Muslims in general and of those Muslims of Wollo in particular. Because it declared that “. . . Whoever is found to help a Muslim after this proclamation will be punished with unheard-of punishment.” Practically the proclamation has threatened that all Muslims would meet severe punishment. It seems that the Shewans were worried about a possible opposition from Wollo, the base of *Lij Iyasu* and his father Mikael.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Gebre-Egziabher Elyas, *Prowess, Piety and Politics: The Chronicle of Abeto Iyasu*, pp. 357-359

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.364



Figure 14 The two contenders: Lij Iyasu (left) and Ras Teferi (right) – Photograph taken from Dessie Museum.

The proclamation ended by deposing Iyasu and in his stead appointing Menilek's daughter Zewditu as Empress with Ras Tafari, the later Emperor Haile-Sellassie as heir to the throne.⁷⁷

The news of the young monarch's removal from power immediately reached Dessie and Mikael by telephone. The telephone message sent to him was as follows:

“ልጅዎ ልጅ ኢያሱ ወደ እስላም ሃይማኖት ስለገቡ እሳቸውን ሽረው የአፄ ምኒልክን ልጅ ወይዘሮ ዘውዲቱን አንግ ሰናል። ደጃዝማች ተፈሪ መኮነንን አልጋ ወራሽና እንደራሴ አድርገናል። ልጅ ኢያሱ ከእስላሞች ጋር ሲሰሩ የከረሙትን ሁሉ ንጉስ ራስዎ ያውቁታል። እርስዎም መምከርና መቆጣትዎን ሰምተናል። አሁን ይህን ስራ የሚጠሉብን አይመስለንም። ንጉሥም ከግዛትዎ አናነቃንቅም።”⁷⁸

Since your son, Lij Iyasu, has been converted to Islamic religion, we deposed him and enthroned Wäyzäro Zäwuditu, the daughter of Menelik. We have made Däjazmach Täfäri Makonnen an heir to the throne. Oh king! You know all what Lij Iyasu has been practicing with Muslims. Since we heard that you advised him, we hope you do not oppose our action. We will never attack your power.

When *Negus* Mikal heard the news, he said: “I cannot silently look on while they take away from him the throne which his grandfather, Emperor Menelik has given him.”⁷⁹ Then he declared that preparation for war against the Shewans would begin. The decree declared:

ወላድ ፍረደኝ

⁷⁷ Edward Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's progress* . . . , pp.47-50; Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , pp.141-148.

⁷⁸ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.159.

⁷⁹ Edward Ullendorff, *My Life and Ethiopia's progress* . . . , p.52.

የጠፋ ልጄን አፋልገኝ⁸⁰

You the bearers of children

Let you help me in searching my disappeared son

These simple words were a call for his people to follow him into battle against the enemies of his son. The response of his people was instant. The mass replied:

አባ ሻንቆ ማማ በሉ ገፋገፋ

ፍየል ይፈልጋል እንኳን ልጅ ሲጠፋ

መቅደላ አፋፉ ላይ ያስካካል ፈረሱ

የዘጠኝ ንጉሥ ልጅ አስረዉ እሱ

እንኳን ሴቶቹና ወንዶቹም ቢነግሱ

አልጋዉን አይለቅም አባ ጤና ኢያሱ⁸¹

*Abba Shanqo Mamme*⁸² let you go ahead

Even a boy a goat will be searched out

His horse neighs on the escarpment of Maqdala

[Lej Iyyassu], descendant of the nine kings, and the tenth, in the line, is himself,

Even if “men” reign, let alone “women”,

⁸⁰ Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu* . . . , p.105

⁸¹ Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo*. . . , p.59, Informants: *Liqe-Kahenat* Taye Tsegaw and *Ato* Kebbede Rufe. (*Aba shanqo* is the horse name of Mikael).

⁸² *Abba Shanqo Mamme* is the horse name given to Mikael, he was named after his horse. Sources explain *Shanqo* to mean ‘black’ and attribute it to the colour of his horse. *Mamme* is a shortened form of the name Mohammed, or Mikael

*Abba Téná*⁸³ Iyasu will not hand over his throne

The response of the mass was positive in that they showed their readiness to fight against Shewa and return Iyasu back to his throne.

On the side of Shewa as well similar preparations were made. Such couplets were composed:

ጥይት አትፈልጉ ከንቱ ነፃ አረር

ከመድፍ ይበረታል የሸዋ ምክር

አፈራርሶት ያድራል በአንድ ቀን አዳር

ወትሮም የእስላም ሥራ የለዉ ቁምነገር

Do not run for bullets as gunpowder is useless in this particular case,

Don't you know that “Shewan counsel” is more harmful than any artillery?

Don't you know that it demolishes all foes overnight, [let alone Iyasu]?

After all, the activities of “Muslims” always have no gravity.⁸⁴

Then Mikael gave orders to his chief lieutenants to prepare and mobilize their forces for the march. Some of his lieutenants recommended Mikael to ally himself with the rulers of Gojjam and Tigray to gain their cooperation and advised him to delay the campaign until the alliance was achieved. Others advised him to wait and move with all of his forces.⁸⁵ But Mikael who was

⁸³ Similarly, Abba Tena is the horse name of Iyasu

⁸⁴ Ahmed Hassen Omer, The "Coup d'État" of September 26, 1916 . . . , p. 112

⁸⁵ Nwga Aeyle, “Centralization Versus Regionalism in Ethiopia: The case of Gojjam 1932-1969”.

ambitious by nature, ignored the advice of his chiefs and decided on instant action with less than one third of his troops.⁸⁶

When the Shewans heard of the mobilization of the forces of *Negus* Mikael, they sent him a letter explaining again that Iyasu's action and his alliance with Moslems against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had pushed them to depose him.⁸⁷ They asked Mikael to accept their decision and avert his march. But Mikael refused the request. Instead, he announced that he would never return to Wollo under any circumstance. Mikael suspected that if he accepted this request, the Shewans might go against his own crown. As he said in his own words:

“ዛሬ ይህንን እኛ ብየ ከተቀበልኩ ሽዋ ምቹ ጊዜ ሲያገኝ ንጉሠ ወሎ ወትግሬ ወጎንደር ወጎጃም ሆኜ የጫንኩትን ዘውድ ለመግፈፍ ምን ይሳነዋል?”

“ . . . If I accept this precondition today, what prohibits the Shewans to come against my crown on Wollo, Tigray, Gonder and Gojjam . . . when they got a favorable time?”⁸⁸

In such away Mikael's army marched deep into Shawa. In the first battle which took place on 17 October 1916, at Tora-Mesk, his forces routed the Shewans. Many of the Shewan army including the chief lieutenant *Ras* Lulseged were killed.⁸⁹ The defeat created a considerable terror in Addis Abbaba.

B.A.Thesis in Political Science, Haylä-Selassé I University, 1970, pp.16-17; Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*. . . , p.105

⁸⁶ Zewde Reta, *Teferi Mekonen: Regimu Ye Seltan Guzo Ba Menilek Ba Iyasuna Ba Zawdu Zaman 1884-1922* [Tefari Mekonnen: The long political journey during the reigns of Menelik, Iyasu and Zewuditu], (Addis Ababa, Central Printing Press, 1998), p.308

⁸⁷ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.163; Edward Ullendorf, *My Life and Ethiopia's progress* . . . , p.52

⁸⁸ Zewde Reta, *Teferi Mekonen* . . . , p.307; Informant: Ato Tefera Melaku.

⁸⁹ Edward Ullendorf, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress* . . . , p. 53.

For that matter, it is reported that in the propagation for combat against the Wollo forces, the nobility circulated that an Islamic army was marching towards the capital. As a result, a mass pray was declared in all churches of the city. In his account the contemporary writer and eye witness, Mersé-Hazen descried that at this time; guns were distributed for civil servants and priests in order to ‘defend their country and religion’.⁹⁰

Soon after the defeat of the Shewans at Tora-Mesk, a message was sent to Mikael from Habte-Giorgis, the commander in chief of the Shewan army. In this message, sent through priests and monks, Habte-Giorgis requested Mikael that they settle their differences peacefully. But the real motive of the message was to delay Mikael, and to buy time for the Shewan army to better prepare itself. Unaware of this motive, the ruse was successful, and Mikael accepted the proposal presented by Habte-Giorgis, temporarily halting his offence.⁹¹

Ten days after Tora-Mesk, on Wednesday, 23 October 1916, Habte-Giorgis sent another letter to Mikael inviting him to fight on Friday. Having wasted ten precious days, Mikael faced the well-prepared Shewan army at the battle of Segelle. The Shewans better position, organization and preparation, gave them the upper hand in the battle, and on 27 October 1916, just a month after the removal of his son from power, *Negus* Mikael was defeated and captured.⁹²

⁹⁰Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p, p.168, Informant: Ato Samuel Mesganaw.

⁹¹ Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, p.106; Leonard Mosley, Haile Selassie, (1964:102).

Fitawrari Habtä Giyorgis was a wise counsellor, a prudent judge, a capable military leader and a staunch patriot at Emperor Menilek's Court. He dominated the Imperial Court during the first half of the present century. He was so popular and so active that stories began to build around his name even before his death. (Bairu Tafla, *Two Ethiopian Biographies*. Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. 6, No. 1 (JANUARY 1968), p. 124

⁹² Zewde Reta, *Teferi Mekonen* . . . , p.314; Emeru Haile-Selassie. “*Kayehut Kemastawsew*. . . , p.78; Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos . *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha*. . . , p.174.

The captive king of Wollo was taken to Zeway in eastern Shewa and imprisoned there for nearly two years. Ill health prompted him to ask for a change of prison. As a result he was moved to Holäta in Shewa some fifty kilometers to the west of Addis, where he was put under house arrest. Six months later, he died on September 8, 1918 at the age of sixty eight and was buried at Holäta Mädhane-Aläm church with a special funeral ceremony

A witness to the battle of Segelle, *Ras Emeru*, wrote that had Mikael moved towards Addis Ababa immediately after Tora-Mesk, he would have victoriously entered the city. Had that happened, the history of Ethiopia would have taken a different path.⁹³

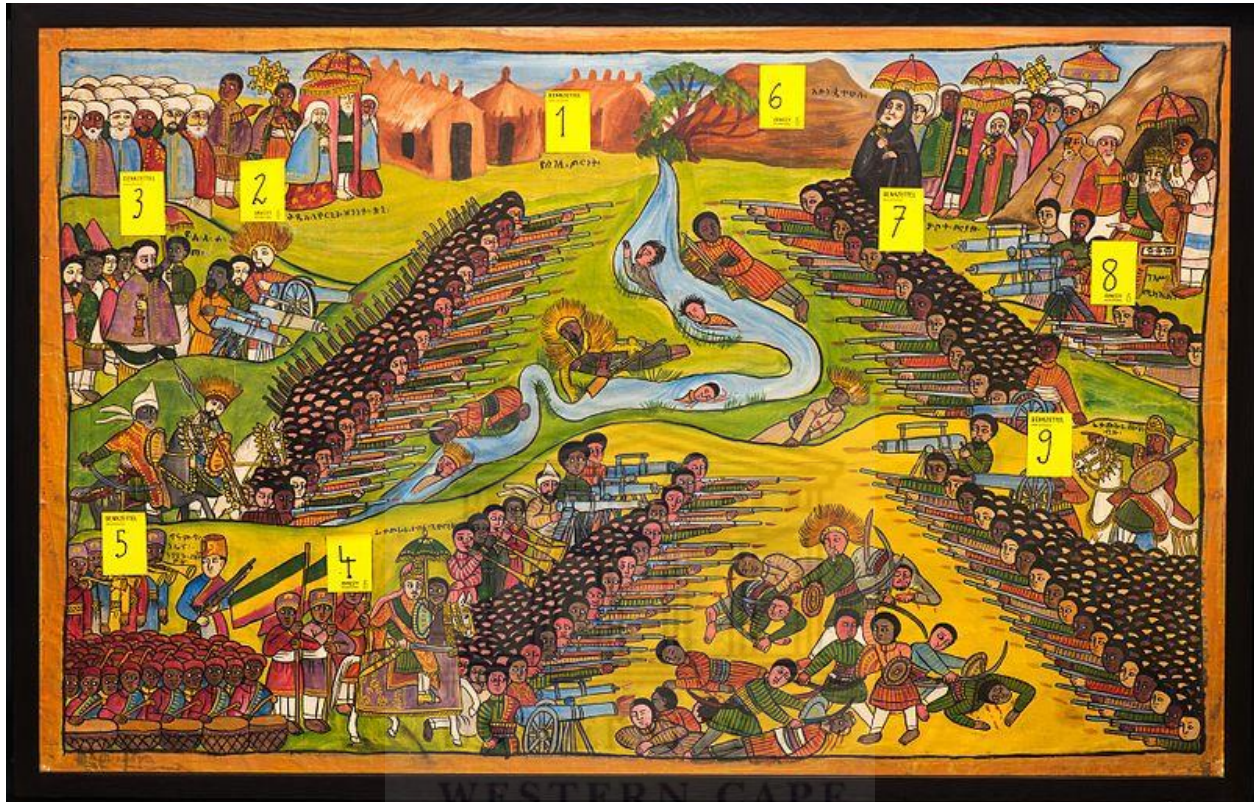


Figure 15 Traditional paint showing the battle of Segelle (Source National Library and Archival center, Ethiopia)

After Segelle, the winners, Shewan aristocrats, who successfully emerged victorious in the power struggle, controlled the state power and kept the hegemony in their own hands. *Ras Teferi*, who is regarded as the champion of the power struggle, continued to rule as *de facto* ruler applied a different strategy that made Wollo under the direct control of himself and the Shewan

organized by the Imperial palace. As the grandfather of the wife of the heir to the throne, the court attended the funeral and observed an official mourning period for *Negus Mikael*.

⁹³ Emeru Haile-Selassie. “*Kayehut Kemastawsew*. . .”, p. 76.

authority. For Wollo, Segelle marked another period of exclusion from the political ground and historiography of the country.

After the coup, the heir and de facto governor, Ras Teferi, decided to make some arrangements with the major chiefs and regional governors with the aim of convincing them on the matter of Iyasu's deposition.⁹⁴ As part of his scheme of persuading the major chiefs, Ras Tafari wrote to Ras Seyum, the governor of Tigray province on 3 *Tiqemet* 1909 E.C. [13 October 1916]. In his letter, he justified the overthrow of *Lij* Iyasu and requested Ras Seyum to recognize Empress Zewditu and himself as the rightful authority. He also demanded his cooperation to preserve the Christian Empire. In his letter to Ras Seyum, Ras Tafari states:

. . . When by the will of God the notables, the people, the Abun and the Ichage discussed and made Empress Zawditu to ascend to her father's throne, they also made me the Crown Prince. Thus, I am delighted and I would like you to share my happiness. This was done because Lij Iyasu neglected the throne and the religion entrusted to him, decided to strengthen the Islamic faith and weaken the government . . . So it is timely, for you, to think for your religion and government that you should be faithful and strong to the central government at your domain.

⁹⁵
..

⁹⁴ Among these chiefs were Ras Damesse, whose son was married to one of *Negus* Mikael's daughters, and Ras Seyum who was his son-in-law. Ras Tafari must also convince Ras Haylu of Gojjan and Ras Walda-Gyorgis of Gondar to give practical support instead of just a lip-service to the Shewan army. Therefore, he wanted to make sure that while he was fighting in the field there was no treachery in other parts of the country that would stab the new regime in the back.

⁹⁵ Hagos Gebre Yohannes. "Political History of Tigray 1910-35". MA Thesis Addis Abbaba University: Department of History, 2003, P.56

Such engagements by the winners had had an adverse effect on Wollo, a province where Iyasu arose from. These later led to the social and political exclusion of the province.



Chapter Seven

The End of Wollo's Ascendancy and Its Exclusion from the Central Ethiopian Politics

Introduction

ራሴን ወገቤን ብሎ ሳይናገር

ሞቶ ተቀበረ ወሎን ያክል አገር

Rasen wogeben bilo sayinager

Moto tekebere Wollon yakil ager

Without letting its sickness known

The great region Wollo has died and been buried

By the time the autonomy of Wollo came to an end following the Battle of Segelle and the captivity of its king, Mikael, in 1916, the people expressed their ill-feeling in popular verses. The verse quoted above depicts Wollo province as a respected person who died and got buried.

In consequence, the Battle of Segelle is a landmark in Ethiopian history in general and the history of Wollo in particular. It brought to an end Wollo's political ascendancy and put it under the more direct control of the central government which was dominated by the Shewan aristocrats. For the Shewans, Segelle was a political success that enabled them to keep the supremacy that they fought for. For Wollo, Segelle was a loss that had tremendous negative consequences. This loss is symbolized as the “death” of the province as it lacked its centrality and political power from that time onwards.

The post-Segelle period in Wollo is characterized by political exclusion, social insecurity, and economic exploitation. In this chapter, I will try to give a precise description of the major socio-political incidents that happened in Wollo in the period after Segelle.

7.1 Invasion and Confrontation

After Segelle, the winners, that is the Shewan ruling elite made an extensive invasion towards Mikael's domain, especially the western and central part of Wollo. The conquest had two major intentions. The first was to capture *Lij* Iyasu who by the time moved from Harrar to Wollo and joined his father's enthusiasts. Even though *Lij* Iyasu was deposed, he was not captured. These seem to have created a fear of a possible revival of *Lij* Iyasu's political power or of a counter *coup d'etat* against his opponents. The second aim of the invasion was to make Wollo under the direct control of the central government. For that matter, successive invasions were launched towards the different districts of Wollo.

In spite of their defeat at Segelle and the capture of their king, the Wollo forces remained disbanded and returned back to Wollo. According to some sources, this is an exceptional case in the military history of Ethiopia in that previously once the leader was killed or captured his followers inevitably disbanded.⁹⁶ The remnants of Wollo troops including *Negus* Mikael's top military commanders who survived the Segelle catastrophe, such as *Ras* Yimer and *Fitawrari*

⁹⁶ For instance, when Emperor Yohannes was killed by the Dervishes of Sudan in 1889, his army had dispersed. Similarly, in the fight between King Menelik of Shewa and King Tekle-Haimanot of Gojjam for power and territory, the former won the latter in 1882. Then, the troops of Tekle-Haimanot had disseminated.

Serah Bezu offered a powerful resistance against the central government to defend their son, Lij Iyasu and not accept Shewa's dominancy over Wollo.⁹⁷

Likewise, following the defeat of the Wollo forces at the battle of Segele in 1916, *Lij* Iyasu realized that nothing could restore him ahead as his father was defeated and Wollo crushed. He and his loyalists understood that they could not hope to hold in Harrar as their military force was dwindling. Thus, it was decided that *Lij* Iyasu should leave Harrar and join what was left of his force with that of his father's in Wollo. Accordingly, before an army had been sent out to fight and capture him, *Lij* Iyasu had rushed to Wollo. Despite the deliberate distortions, fabrications, and accusations made against *Lij* Iyasu, many people in Wollo stood with him to fight against the Shewan forces. The majority of people in Wollo took the allegation of Iyasu's conversion to Islam as a baseless, not evidence-based and a trumped-up story. As a result, in Wollo, Iyasu enjoyed the support of the people.⁹⁸

The place Iyasu has chosen to defend himself from the invading forces was the hill of Maqdala, the last fortress of Emperor Tewodros, where he tried to withstand the siege and bombardment of the fortress by the British expeditionary force in 1868. For that matter, in December 1916, *Lij*

⁹⁷ Abdul Mohammed, "A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael 1868-1963" BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1990, p. 8; Informants: Ato Kassa Gedamu and Ato Assefa Sisay

⁹⁸ Marcus, Harold. *Haile Selassie I: The Formative Years 1892-1936*, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1998, p. 29

Iyasu moved to Maqdala where he used it as a focal point of resistance. At Maqdala, he tried to strengthen his position for about eight months.⁹⁹

In the meantime, a strong Shewan force was sent to Maqdala to dislodge *Lij* Iyasu from the fortress. They had travelled through Wore-Illu and reached Tanta, nearly fifteen kilo meters away from Maqdala. But *Lij* Iyasu and his adversaries are said to have defended their position against the Shewan forces. A month after, in January 1917, another Shewan contingent led by *Ras* Demis launched another attempt to control the fortress. However, on their way they were ambushed by the local inhabitants whom they viewed them as “occupiers”. According to informants, the natives of Tenta and the neighboring areas, organized in small groups of ten and twenty, harassed them making them suffer heavy loss.¹⁰⁰

Due to the stiff resistance from the local people, the invading Shewan forces diverted their attention towards punishing the local inhabitants. As a result, from February to May 1917, *Ras* Demis sent punitive expedition to devastate the surrounding districts of Jiffa, Amba-Maryam, Yerima and Koreb. In this excursion, many were said to have been killed. Even those who had taken refuge in the churches which had been regarded as inviolable sanctuaries such as Tenta Mikael were forced to get out. Many were massacred. Others were jailed. Priests who were serving in such churches suspected of collaboration were also imprisoned.¹⁰¹

Thereafter, more numerous and better armed troops were sent from Shewa under the leadership of the war minister, *Fitawurari* Habte- Giorgis to force Iyasu to surrender. In the meantime, *Ras* Wolde Giorgis of Gonder moved down to Wollo to assist the Shewan attacking forces. The

⁹⁹ Gobeze Tafete, *Aba Tena Iyasu*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1996), pp. 118-119

¹⁰⁰ Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo: 1872-1916*. MA Thesis. Department of History, Addis Ababa University, (1983), pp. 82-84; Informants: Ato Maregu Fiseha and Ato Solomon Masresha

¹⁰¹ Ibid; Informants: Aleqa Taye and other informants I interviewed in group in Tenta

strategy *Lij* Iyasu adopted in order to defend himself was to try to block Wollo's major lines of communication to and from Shewa and Gonder. For that matter, he is said to have placed *Ras* Yimer in the direction of the main route connecting Wollo with Gonder to prevent *Ras* Wolde Giorgis' advance. Another detachment of troops was sent to Albuko, a district which is one of the major routes to and from Shewa. This was aimed to prevent any Shewan advance from that direction. But both ended with disaster. Both defence lines were beaten. At last, the forces of *Fitawurari* Habte-Giorgis surrounded and sieged Maqdala thereby forcing *Lij* Iyasu to vacate the fortress and retreat towards Dessie. Right away, the Shewan forces followed the footsteps of *Lij* Iyasu towards Dessie, the other place where another bloodiest incursion and stiff resistance was made.¹⁰²

In August 1917, *Fitawrari* Habte Giyorgis marched to Dessie at the head of a very large army. He was accompanied by *Ras* Kasa, *Ras* Abate, and *Ras* Gugsu Wale. Thus, the battle of Dessie took place on Monday 27 August 1917. This was said to have been the last and the bloodiest major battle which fought between the two forces. The Wollo forces under *Lij* Iyyasu, *Ras* Yimar, *Fitawrari* Sirah Bizu, *Qannazmach* Salih and Amade Gabra Igzi'abiher, made sporadic resistance in the town of Dessie and the surrounding vicinities.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo . . .*, p. 85

A secret agreement was concluded between *Ras* Wolde Giorgis and the Shewan notables for military support of the former to the later. Finally, as a favor for accompanying the Shewan forces in Wollo, *Ras* Wolde-Giorgis was promoted to Negus.

¹⁰³ Abdul Mohammed, "A biography of *Ras* GebreHiwot Mikael, p. 8; Paul Henze, *Layers of time: A history of Ethiopia*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000, p.196

According to informants, the Shewan troops fought mainly from within their fortification. The Wolloyes are said to have tried to storm their adversary's fortification by a single frontal assault. Some of them managed to penetrate the Shewan fortification and engaged in a hand to hand combat. But it was a fruitless task. Overwhelmed by their rivals, many of them were killed. Because of their repeated and futile attempt to break through the Shewan defense, the Wollo troops were easy targets for the well-placed machine guns of the Shewan army.

At Dessie, the victory once again went to the Shawan side when they fought in a victorious conclusion. Among the senior commanders of Wollo, *Fitawurari* Serah Bizu was killed and *Ras* Yimer was wounded and captured. Only *Lij* Iyasu, with very few of his men, managed to escape. Besides, since the day the battle of Dessie was fought was rainy, all the rivers and streams in and around Dessie had overflowed. This made it difficult for the defeated to flee from the battlefield. Among those who attempted to escape, many are said to have drowned.¹⁰⁴

In the battles of Sagale, Magdala, and Dasse, the fighting capacity of the Wollo forces was completely exhausted. This is supposed to be the main reason for the overwhelming defeat of the Wollo troop. In addition to the fatigue of their fighting capacity, the poor governorship of their commanders is said to have been the other basic factor for Wollo's complete defeat. As the matured and experienced commanders died and were captured at Segelle, those who were leading the Battle of Dessie were said to have been junior leaders. Besides, the superiority of Shewa in terms of armaments is said to have contributed to their victory and then the defeat of Wollo.¹⁰⁵

According to informants, in Wollo, the time immediately after Segelle was a period of "untold misery". For about a year after the battle of Segelle, Wollo was in a state of turmoil. The inhabitants felt insecure and civilians were harassed, imprisoned, killed and their property looted. Many high-ranking officials of Wollo including *Fitawurari* Serah Bizu Gebre, *Negus* Mikael's

¹⁰⁴ Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo*. . . , p. 89

After escaping from the fortress of Maqdala, Iyasu fled to the low land region of Afar and then to Tigray where he roamed for five years till he was captured in 1921. The reason why *Lij* Iyasu went to Tigray was that he had hoped that *Ras* Seyum being his brother-in-law (who at that time was married to *Negus* Mikael's daughter, *Woyzaro* Tewabech) would help him to fight against the central government and restore his power.

¹⁰⁵ Soon after bringing Dessie under his total control, Habte Giyorgis, went to Maqdala and damaged the historic fortress. (Atnaf Seged Yilma, *Abeto Iyasu: Anesas ena Awodadek* [The Rise and Fall of Abeto Iyasu] Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Enterprise. 2006 EC, p. 187)

military commander and Ras Gebre Hiywot Mikael, Iyassu's eldest brother were taken prisoners.¹⁰⁶

In addition to this, the invaders are said to have looted the properties of inhabitants. The British ambassador in Ethiopia, Wilfered Theisger, reported that the raiders ransacked cattle from Wollo. He wrote: “Ras Wolde Giorgis is practically looting Wollo at the present moment on his own account and sending herds of cattle and a large amount of the supplies to his own country, Gonder” According to Mosley, within six months, Ras Wolde Giorgis drove more than fifty thousand cattle out of Wollo into his own province. In some cases, the invaders put into effect a scorched-earth policy when they burned and destroyed the houses and harvest of the inhabitants.

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Of all these, the grimmest aspect of the battle of Dessie came later, when Shewan commanders gave orders to their troops to kill all their prisoners. A few days after the battle of Dessie, Shewan troops, popularly referred to as “Chabo” by the natives, were given free hand to slaughter the inhabitants and loot their property or otherwise devastate it. Thus, most of the Wollo prisoners taken at the battle of Dessie are said to have been killed by their captors. The few who survived are supposed to have had either their feet and or hands cut off. The inhabitants of Wollo mentioned this cruel act the Shewan soldiers made on them in the following couplet.

እንጀራ ጠፋ እንጂ ስጋማ ምን ገድ

¹⁰⁶ Mahiteme Selassie Wolde Meskel, *Zikre Neger*, Addis Ababa: 1962 EC, p. 29; Abdul Mohammed, “A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael. . . , p. 33; Informants: Ato Tamene Mengistu and Memre Ayalewu Wolde Maryam

¹⁰⁷ F.O 371/2854, 3 January 1917 Thesiger to Grey; Abdul Mohammed, “A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael, p. 8; Leonard Mosley, Haile Sellassie: The Conquering Lion. London: 1964, p. 111

ድፍን የወሎ ሰዉ እንደ በጉ ታርዶ¹⁰⁸

What is lacking is Injera whereas meat is available

Since the people of Wollo has been slaughtered like sheep

Many informants, especially in the western part of Wollo, were brought up hearing about the Shewan atrocity which they labelled it “a blatant and deliberate act of crime.” On the other hand, this tragic event has been depicted as unintentional or as collateral damage caused by an accidental miscommunication between the central command and the rank and file of Habte Giyorgis's army.¹⁰⁹

Whenever an army contingent operates amidst a non-sympathetic population, the occurrence of such atrocity would be inevitable. Literature on the impacts of armed conflicts on the lives of civilians provides evidence that such conflicts result in physical, mental and economic effects on the lives of survivors.¹¹⁰ The widespread trauma caused by these atrocities and suffering of the civilian population is another legacy of these conflicts as it creates extensive emotional and psychological stress. The final consequence was the social and political exclusion of Wollo in the post-Segelle Ethiopia.

7. 2. Aftermath: Social and Political Exclusion

As mentioned earlier, Segelle brought an end to Wollo's political ascendancy. After the deposition of *Lij* Iyasu and the capture of *Negus* Mikael, various social and political measures

¹⁰⁸ Asnake Ali, Aspects of the Political History of Woll. . . , p. 90; Informants: Ato Dagne Chala and Ato Getahun Mohammed

¹⁰⁹ Mersé Hazen Wolde Qirqos. *Ye Hayagnaw kekle zemen Mebabacha: Ye Zeman Tarik Teztaye Kayehutna Kesemahut, 1896-1922*. [The Turn of the 20th Century: My memory from What I Saw and Heard] Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C, p. 203; Informant: Liqe Kahinat Taye

¹¹⁰ Massimiliano Bratti, Mariapia Mendola and Alfonso Miranda, “Hard to Forget: The Long-Lasting Impact of War on Mental Health”, Discussion Paper No. 9269, *Università degli Studi di Milano*, Milan: Itlay, 2015, p. 2

were taken on Wollo by the Shewans. These include the replacement of much of the administration with appointees from Shewa. Following Mikael's demise and after bringing the whole of Wollo under his control, *Ras Teferi*, the late Emperor Haile Selassie introduced a policy of designating “natives of Shewa” to govern over the province of Wollo.¹¹¹

Hence, between 1916 and 1935 as many as seven Shawan notables were appointed to govern Wollo. These were *Ras Abata* (1916-1917), *Ras Kassa* (1917) *Ras Kabada* (1918-1925), *Fitawurari Aragay* (1925-1927), *Dajach Seyoum* (1927-1930) *Dajach Imeru* (1930-1932) and *Dajach Wadaje* (1932-1935). Under them, the region entered a new period in its history.¹¹²

As a result of this, most of the Wollo nobility and their retainers were pushed out of their hereditary posts. Regarding this Asnake wrote:

After the battle of Segelle, the opportunity the Wollo nobility had under Negus Mikael's leadership to occupy a central place in the political life of Ethiopia and decided upon the country's destiny came to an abrupt end. They were reduced to an insignificant status even in their own home region. The Shawan governors appointed to rule over the region pushed them out of their hereditary posts in all the provinces and districts.¹¹³

From the time of Segelle till he was overthrown in 1974, throughout the long reign of Emperor Haile-Selassie, Wollo was administered by non-native appointees who were sent to the region from different provinces, principally Shewa.

¹¹¹ Abdul Mohammed, “A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael. . .”, p. 9

¹¹² Asnake Ali, “The conditions of the peasantry in Wollo 1919-1935: A Review of the Traditions”, In *Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Department of History*, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, 1986, p. 1

¹¹³ Asnake Ali, *Aspects of the Political History of Wollo. . .*, p. 93

Of course, after he was crowned as Emperor in 1930, Haile Selassie took a number of initiatives to replace the traditional, decentralized governance structure with “modern” centralized state machinery. This led to the end of the role of the nobility or at least the gradual reduction of their role in local leadership.¹¹⁴

However, I argue that the circumstance of Wollo is different from other provinces at least for two reasons. First, Wollo had been placed under the direct control of the Shewan dominated central government earlier before the beginning of the centralization policy of Haile Selassie. And it was part of the big project of the Shewan aristocrats to keep the political supremacy and not Haile Selassie’s policy of centralization. This makes Wollo’s case unique. Secondly, in other provinces where the centralization policy was put into effect, the provinces were made to be administered by their own hereditary rulers. To mention but few, the northern province of Tigray continued to be administered by Ras Seyum Mengesha, and Gojjam by Ras Hailu Tekle Hayimanot, son of king TekleHayimanot, the hereditary ruler of the province.¹¹⁵ But, in Wollo, the entire hereditary rulers of the province were sacked from their governorship positions and replaced by extra-terrestrial appointees. This marked Wollo’s loss of its former political and economic importance as the political center in the twentieth century. Thus, Wollo has been excluded from the political ground when it lost its central position and when its hereditary rulers

¹¹⁴ Christophe Van der Beken, “Ethiopia: From A Centralised Monarchy to A Federal Republic”, *Afrika Focus*, Vol. 20, Nr. 1-2, 2007, p. 22

Formerly, regional governors were more or less independent in their own provinces and look upon themselves as kings owing scarcely more than lip-service to an emperor remote in the capital. They paid their own armies, maintain their own customs etc. The chiefs were allowed to rule the country with which their families had been associated until some misdeed or act of disloyalty brought deposition. But Haile Selassie followed a different approach when he created an absolutist monarchy. His authority was unlimited and unquestionable and his function multi-faceted: the emperor was the head of the executive, the fountain of justice, the agent of change and the law-giver, albeit moderated by parliament that lacked the competence to enact law. To a careful observer, such clauses represent a significant departure from the Ethiopian tradition of the right to rule which was open for any one (presumably from the regional nobility) who combines competence, might and Solomonic legend.

¹¹⁵ Hagos Gebre Yohannes, *Political History of Tigray 1910-35*. MA Thesis Addis Abbaba University: Department of History, 2003, p. 94

were pushed from the political ground. Wollo not only missed its central position but also its self-governing power.

As this exclusion created grievance among the people of Wollo, the people expressed their resentment in the following verse:

አባ ሻንቆ ማሜ ቤትህ አፈሰሰ

ከከዳኙ ነው ወይ ወይስ ሳሩ አነሰ

ከከዳኙም አይደል ሳሩም አላነሰ

እንዲያው መሰረቱ ምስሶው ፈረሰ

Abba Shanqo Mamme your house has been leaking

Is the problem from the thatcher or the grass?

It is neither from the thatcher nor the grass

*Just the base, the pillar is cracked*¹¹⁶

The above verse indicates and acknowledged the end of the autonomy of Wollo and also the abolishment of its crown. The verse depicts Wollo's exclusion as the collapse of a house from its inner base.

¹¹⁶Gobeze Tafete, *Abba Tena Iyassu*. . . , p. 143; Misganaw Tadesse. "The Life and Contributions of Negus Mikael of Wollo". MA Thesis, Bahir Dar University: Department of History: (2012), p. 34

The new rulers who came from other regions were distinct from the Wollo peasantry culturally, in religion and in many cases ethnically as well. As a result, they were seen as strangers. Studies indicate that such political exclusion on a certain community not only creates grievances against the new authorities but also a sense of “otherness” towards them.¹¹⁷ According to written sources and oral informants, the administration of the new appointees was characterized by extreme repression and rapacious exploitation. Among others, *Ras* Kebede is known for worsening the life of the people of Wollo. His unfair administration of justice was another source of plight for the peasants. He is said to have allowed his soldiers to exercise unlimited authority over the peasants of Wollo. The latter had to fulfil whatever the former demanded from them. Those who refused or failed to meet all demands might get flogged to death by their masters. The maladministration of *Ras* Kebede and his retainers is expressed in the following verse

ቀን ተኝቶ ውሎ ሌት ያለቅሳል ውሻ

አዝቡን አስለቀሰዉ ከበደ መንገሻ¹¹⁸

Qen tegniito wulo let yaleksal wusha

Zizbun asleqesew Kebede Mengesha

Kebede Mengesha has made the people cry

Like a dog which sleeps all day and cries at night.

¹¹⁷ Victor Asal , Michael Findley , James A. Piazza , and James Igoe Walsh, “Political Exclusion, Oil, and Ethnic Armed Conflict”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2016, Vol. 60(8), p. 1345

¹¹⁸ Tekeste Melake. “The Early History of Dessie 1886-1941”. BA Thesis Addis Ababa University: Department of History, (1995), pp. 19-20; Informants: Ato Chane Kebede and Ato Bezabeh Arega
The rule of the first two Shewan notables, *Ras* Abate and *Ras* Kassa, was said to have been of no consequence since their stay in the region was of short duration. The rule of the other five, however, was to leave its imprint upon the region for a long time. *Ras* Abate, who had been appointed over the region shortly after the battle of Sagale, died of illness in October 1917. *Ras* Kassa who replaced him was also transferred to Salale in Shawa, after a stay of only two months.

The unbearable injustice and administrative problems that prevailed in the region obviously caused tremendous suffering on the entire population. When Asnake mentioned the miserable condition of the peasants of Wollo he underlined: “The peasants continued in their former status of gait to these new masters of the land. For a superficial observer, it may seem that the peasants only changed old over-lords for new ones and their life conditions remained the same as before. However, this was not the case. The social and economic burden they had to carry under their old masters was easier to bear.”¹¹⁹

These overall situations in Wollo in the post Segelle period is said to have created discontent among the local people. The following moving verse, composed in commemoration of *Negus Mikael* during his burial, about three years after Segelle, tells us a lot about the existing public frustration as regards the widespread havoc and maladministration that plagued Wollo after his demise.

አባ ሻንቆ ማሜ አንድ ጊዜ ተነስተህ አስር ጊዜ ሙት

ሀገርህን ባየሃት እንዳደረጓት¹²⁰

Abba Shanqo Mame [Mikael], please wake up once

Just to see what they [the Shewans] have done to your country [Wollo],

And die ten times later.

¹¹⁹ Asnake Ali, The conditions of the peasantry in Wollo. . . , p.1

¹²⁰ Gobeze Tafete, *Abba Tena Iyassu*, pp. 142-143

This verse is told to recall the period of relative peace and stability in Wollo during Mikael's time.

In addition to the political exclusion and maladministration, the inhabitants of Wollo have been subjected to various social and economic exploitation. The new rulers are said to have followed harsh socio-economic policies. One such harsh policy was the confiscation of land. After the Wollo ruling elites were pushed from their hereditary posts, their land together with the tenants working on it was confiscated and granted to retainers and troops who came from Shewa, Harar and the southern regions. As a result, the notables of Wollo were made *gebars* (serfs) in their own ancient estates.¹²¹

While the ruling elites of Wollo had appropriated their lands, the peasants had suffered from multiplied taxation. Particularly, *Ras* Kebede is said to have introduced new types of taxes some of which are not usual in other parts of the country. One such exceptional tax imposed on the peasants of Wollo was referred to as *Yefaras Gefera* (literally means fodder for horses and mules) by which each peasant in the region had to make an annual contribution of one *qunna*¹²² for the upkeep of the horses and mules of the *Ras*. One more such a tax was *Yenegasi*, (literary mean tax to the governor) by which each peasant had to pay annually one Maria Theresa thalers which went to the *Ras*'s treasury. At one time, *Ras* Kebede is also said to have demanded

¹²¹ Gashaw Muhammed, "Administrative History of Wollo: 1941-1974," M.A Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University. 2003, p.9; Abdul Mohammed, "A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael, p. 9
Gebars refers to a taxpayer or a peasant who possessed land, for which tax was paid. The root of the term "*geber*" was a payment in different forms to the upper officials.

¹²² *Quna* is a traditional container which is used to measure grain. One *quna* is equals to 15 kilograms. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800 - 1935*. Addis Ababa. 1968, p.153

payment of one thaler from every peasant who wore a trouser.¹²³ This made the economic and social conditions of the people, particularly the peasantry, worse.

Besides the harsh social and economic policies of the Shewan appointees, particularly *Ras* Kebede, the movements of various troops in the province had a tremendous impact upon the life of the peasants. As mentioned previously, in order to bring Wollo under full control and capture *Lij yasu*, different fights have taken place in the region. Many soldiers were transported to the different districts of Wollo. Even after the Battle of Dessie was over, a number of soldiers arrived in Wollo to follow the footsteps of *Lij yasu* who fled to the low land of Awusa, the present-day Afar region. Then again, those Shewan appointees to rule over Wollo were moving to the province together with numerous troops who escort them. For instance, *Ras* Kebede entered Dessie in 1918 with an extensive number of soldiers. Similarly, when *Dejazmach* Fikre Maryam appointed in Wollo, he moved to Dessie with a large number of retainers.¹²⁴

The presence of abundant troops in the province meant a burden for the local inhabitants as the peasants had to accommodate to the campaigners. Pieces of literature from military history indicate that in such a situation of troop's movements, soldiers could enforce civilians to fill their basic needs. In this regard, Wenger and Mason wrote: "Much of the recent academic literature depicts the relationship in civil wars between civilians and combatants (be they government or

¹²³ Asnake Ali, *The condition of the peasantry in Wollo . . .*, p.2

¹²⁴ Abdul Mohammed, *A biography of Ras GebreHiwot Mikael . . .*, p. 10; Asnake Ali, *The condition of the peasantry in Wollo . . .*, p. 3; *Ras* Kebede is said to have forced recruits from among the peasants of Wollo who could participate in the campaign to capture *Lij* Iyassu. However, the peasant recruits, unaccustomed to campaigns and without the desire for it, were unable to endure the long and difficult journey to the hot lowlands of Awssa. While some died on the way, many of them managed to escape and returned to their places.

rebel troops) as highly complex and dynamic. . . Armed elites manipulate civilians to further their respective interests.”¹²⁵

Similarly, districts that were targets of the troop movements are said to have been exposed to more severe liability. The troops, who were stationed in Wollo during the time under discussion, were billeted in the houses of the peasants in the districts through which they passed or stayed in. The inhabitants were forced to slaughter their farm animals to feed the combatants.

In addition to the economic burden by affording the soldiers with the necessary accommodation, the peasants were exposed to various social abuses. It is reported that the peasants were forced to surrender their wives and daughters as concubines to their new overlords. Their sons, who were not old enough to participate in farm labor, were made household servants of the new governors and their retainers.¹²⁶

To summarize, the general situation in Wollo in the post Segelle period was such that the political exclusion, the exchange of leaders one after another, the harsh socio-economic policies, the frequent movement of troops in the region and their looting and confiscation, created instability among the inhabitants. The economic and social condition of the people, particularly of the peasantry, which had been made bad by the wars they fought in 1916 and 1917, was worsened in the subsequent years.

¹²⁵ Andreas Wenger and Simon J. A. Mason, “The civilianization of armed conflict: trends and implications”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Volume 90 Number 872 December 2008, p. 843

¹²⁶ Asnake Ali, The condition of the peasantry in Wollo, p. 1; Informants: Ato Nurye Abate, Gerazmach Wolle Aliyu and Ato Zinabu Tadesse

Unable to undertake cultivation due to the above situations, the peasants were exposed to famine. As a result, many peasants were even forced to migrate to neighboring provinces of Gojjam and Begemidir.¹²⁷ The bitter economic condition of the Wollo peasantry in this period is reflected in public verses composed at the time. The disgruntled Wolloyes, glorifying the past and perceiving the future as a threat mentioned their ill-feeling by the 'mythical' labelling of Iyasu's reign as bountiful and the post-Iyasu rule of Zewditu and *Ras* Teferi as a time of starvation and abject poverty. As the saying goes:

በኢያሱ ዳቦ ነዉ ትራሱ

በዘዉዲቱ ተደፋ ሌማቱ

በተፈሪ ጠፋ ፍርፋሪ

ወዴት ነዉ ያለኸዉ ኢያሱ አባ ጤና

ችጋር ሊገድለኝ ነዉ እባክህ ቶሎ ና¹²⁸

During Iyasu's time, bread was just a pillow

During Zewditu's rule, the plate is turned down

During Teferi's [Haile Selassie's] time even a scrape is lost!

Where have you gone Iyasu Abba Tena?

Please hurriedly come we are starving to death!

¹²⁷ Tekeste Melake. *The Early History of Dessie*. . . , p. 20

¹²⁸ Gobeze Tafete, *Abba Tena Iyasu*, pp. 152; Informants: Ato Kebede Rufe, Ato Tefera Melaku and Ato Fetha Negest

Wollo, the onetime center of Ethiopian empire, the place where numerous socio-political events had taken place, again become a center of modern Ethiopian politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the aftermath of Segelle as it lost its autonomy.



Conclusion

This dissertation has examined that the socio-political history of Wollo province is characterized by two different edges: high degree of acculturation among the different ethnic and religious groups of the province, on the one hand and, extreme political marginalization of the region by the ruling elites of the imperial government, on the other hand.

In the beginning of my study I asked why, how and in what way Wollo was being excluded from political ground and in Ethiopian historical narration. Throughout my discussion, I found that the principal cause for both the acculturation and exclusion is deep-rooted in the two major events of the sixteenth century that happened in Wollo: the expansion of Islam and the movement of the Oromo towards the province. These happenings transformed the Christian dominated Bete Amhara to a multicultural Wollo.

The dissertation has analysed that the arrival of Islam and Oromo in Wollo had changed the demographic structure of the province. It shows how far these happenings made Wollo a multi-ethnic and multi-religious province than any other northern and central provinces of the country.

Though Islam entered Wollo through the war of aggression, it later brought about socio cultural changes in the province which led to peaceful co-existence among the different religious and ethnic groups of the province. The opening of Islamic schools in different parts of the province made Wollo center of Islamic education and culture as equal as it was the center of Christianity and Church education. Due to such developments, a region which once was the center of Christianity and Christian culture now became center of Islam and Islamic education. This makes Wollo a province where the two major religions of the Country, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, are deeply rooted.

In addition to the advent of Islam, the study has explored that the massive Oromo movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries introduced a new ethnic element upon the former inhabitants of Wollo. This work has shown how far the Oromo settlement transformed the medieval Bete Amhara into their homeland, and also brought different cultural and ritual practices which resulted in the cultural and demographic changes in the province.

For more than five hundred years, the different ethnic and religious groups of Wollo lived together and intermingled among each other. In their interaction for centuries, the one imposed its own influence on the other and in return took some cultural elements from the other. This makes Wollo a cultural melting pot. The dissertation has explored that this interaction and integration between the different ethnic and religious groups in Wollo led to the emergence of a unique genetic amalgam and cultural hybridity in the province which later made peaceful coexistence possible in the province. This makes Wollo one of the few places in the world where Muslims and Christians live together in harmony being mixed and intermingled.

However, among the Christian highland provinces these intermingling and interaction among Wolloyes (people of Wollo) is not seen as worthy. Rather, it is seen as a weakness. There was a tendency of considering the Wolloyes as relaxed or “superficial” in their religious practices, because of their intermixing among each other. In the royal Chronicles of Ethiopia, Wollo is defined as a province contaminated by Islam and *Galla*. Among the Christian population of the highlands it was widely such discriminatory sayings as the following were spoken about the Christians of Wollo: “የወሎ ቆራቢ የለዉም” (meaning, there is no genuine Christian from Wollo). For the highland Christians [of Shewa, Gojjam, Gonder and Tigay] a Wolloye Christian is not far different from Islam.

My dissertation thus portrays such social exclusion towards the communities of Wollo province regardless of their religion and ethnicity. This shows that the exclusion was not limited to Islam and Oromo.

Contrary to the past adverse narrations about Wollo's multiculturalism, very recently, Wollo is considered as an exemplar of peaceful coexistence for contemporary Ethiopia where ethnic and religious based conflicts began to arise. This historical experience of Wollo which has been accused of religious laxness in the thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in recent times is seen as a model of peaceful coexistence. In many conflict resolution and peace-making conferences, Wollo is now being mentioned as a model of harmonious relationship. Particularly, in the current discussions and debates on peaceful co-existence which are organized by the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia,¹²⁹ issues of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence have become central agendas. In such cases Wollo is mentioned as a model of peaceful coexistence.¹³⁰

Here it is important to remind Marwick's words who wrote: "what happened in the past affects all aspects of our lives in the present." According to him, the past is important to the present because most societies have felt a need to reproduce some sort of account or interpretation of their past.¹³¹ Likewise, the Ethiopians as a whole seem to constantly encourage this experience of Wollo by fusing it with the present.

¹²⁹ The council is established by the main six religious institutions of Ethiopia to promote peaceful coexistence and collaboration among religious institutions and communities in Ethiopia.

¹³⁰ Meron Zeleke, 'We are the same but different': Accounts of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Adherents of Islamic Sufi Saints, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, 2 (2014), p. 200
Jon Abbink, Religious freedom and the political order: the Ethiopian 'secular state' and the containment of Muslim identity politics, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2014, p. 351

¹³¹ Arthur Marwick, *The nature of history*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 3

In recognition of the peaceful co-existence in Wollo, it is explicated in traditional Wollo songs as:

የፍቅር እንጎቻ የሚቋደሱበሽ

የሁሉ አገር እኩል የውበት አዳራሽ

A place where people share love,

A place for all equally, a parlor for beauty

Politically, the influx of Islam and Oromo in the medieval province of Bete Amhara was seen as a threat to the Christian imperial state. Though, the northern Oromo of Wollo founded their own ruling dynasties, by the mid-nineteenth century those dynasties were regarded as usurpers for being *Galla* and Muslims nevertheless they played a great role in the socio-political ground of the province. The leaders were viewed as the “destroyer of Christianity and Civilization”. Even those leaders of the *Weresheikh* who converted to Christianity were never accepted as legitimate leaders.

For that matter, the image given to the northern Oromos settled in Wollo was adverse. Thus, it can be concluded that its domination by Muslims and Oromo caused Wollo to be marginalized by the political elites of the north. This study has observed that though the exclusion had ethnic and religious aspect, it was totally political

Time and again, two centuries after their arrival, the presence of Islam and Oromo in Wollo especially their seizure of political power was seen as a punishment from God due to the sin of forefathers. That is why the two emperors who started the creation of the modern Ethiopian Empire, Tewodros and Yohannes, who were alarmed by the presence of Islam in the region followed a different approach towards Wollo. As both emperors declared, in their policy of political and religious consolidation during the second half of the nineteenth century, their

motives towards Wollo was to “end the *Galla* power and to suppress Islam.” In the process, the Wollo ruling dynasties were chased out from the political ground.

In the same way, Wollo has been pushed from Ethiopian political ground and also subjected to socio-economic mistreatment in the second decade of the twentieth century. In spite of its recurrence as a regional power, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century under its leader Imam Mohamed Ali, the later *Ras/Negus* Mikael, Wollo’s position was challenged by the Shewan ruling elites. Though it was a power rivalry between the ruling elites of the two politically strong provinces of Shewa and Wollo, the justification the Shewan nobility put to depose *Lij* Iyasu was his Islamic background as he was descended from a dynasty of Muslim lords of Wollo. The labelling goes as far as the “removal of a Muslim prince from a Christian throne”

The study therefore analysed how and in what way Wollo ruling elites were unfairly pushed from their hereditary posts and excluded from the political ground of the country in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Following Segelle, all the hereditary rulers of Wollo including its king Mikael and the designated heir to the Ethiopian throne, *Lij* Iyasu were banished from their hereditary posts. This is said to be an automatic exclusion of Wollo from the political ground

The study further shows the social and economic conditions in Wollo; the social insecurity, economic exploitation and the miserable life of the peasants in the post Segelle period.

The cumulative impact of imperial misrule created resentment and grievances among the Wolloyes. Since the overthrow of Mikael and the placement of *Lij* Iyasu, Wollo had strong resentment against the central government. The Wolloyes expressed their grievances throughout the reign of Haile Selassie.

Studies show that ethnic or religious groups are more likely to engage in organized violence when they are excluded from the political system and are unable to pursue their interests or redress their grievances in a peaceful manner.¹³² Though they did not engage in violent activities, the Wolloyes who were discontented by the socio-economic exploitation in the post Segelle period repeatedly showed their grievances to the Imperial government. One of such resentments is seen during the Italian invasion. When the Italians invaded Ethiopia in 1935, the Emperor issued a decree of mobilization of forces on 3 October 1935. Likewise, he sent message to all the chiefs in the province who were in charge of administration on the regional and district levels to mobilize the people and lead them to the north front. The people of Wollo who were discontented by those exclusions and exploitation in the post Segelle period are said to have replied “ለማን አልጋ ነዉ የምንዋጋዉ?” meaning “for whose throne are we going to fight?”

It is also worth noting that Haile Selassie while on his way to Addis Ababa retreating from the battle front met an ambush from the Wolloyes who were bent on avenging the humiliation they endured at Segelle and thereafter. Though the Emperor scored victory over the Wollo forces and managed to leave the country, this incident has often been cited as an additional reason for his disenchantment and lack of sympathy towards Wollo.

Moreover, the people of the province who had suffered from Socio-economic mistreatment and maladministration had petitioned to the Imperial government in different times thought not solved. In their petition, they detailed the mismanagement and harsh socio-economic policies of the ‘Shewan appointees’ over Wollo.¹³³

¹³² Victor Asal and etal, *Political Exclusion, Oil, and Ethnic Armed Conflict*, Journal of Conflict Resolution 2016, Vol. 60(8), p. 1344

¹³³ Some of the petitions are attached in the appendix

To conclude, the thesis has observed the place given to Wollo in Ethiopian historical narrations written by winners. In the narrations of the post Segelle period, the affairs of *Lij* Iyasu remain obscure and widely unknown, even to specialized researchers. This is due to an oversimplified condemnation of the young prince as “a Muslim Wolloye”. The official Ethiopian historiography established during the long reign of Haile Selassie, depicted *Lij* Iyasu as almost a traitor to the Solomonic dynasty and the Ethiopian Empire. Similarly, the internal events of Wollo have been ignored and or given adverse image like those recordings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hence, this study serves as a reconstruction of the Socio-political history of Wollo province in the period under study.



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List of Informants

No	Title	Name	Age	Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Remark
1	<i>Ato</i>	Kedir Hussie	71	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
2	<i>Woizero</i>	Berhane Zerihun	52	Dessie	07/03/2017	
3	<i>Sheikh</i>	Hussien Ali	77	Tenta	19/05/2017	
4	<i>Woizero</i>	Ansha Adem	54	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
5	<i>Woizero</i>	Aminat Seid	48	Dessie	08/03/2017	
6	<i>Sheikh</i>	Ousman Abebe	69	Dessie	08/03/2017	
7	<i>Ato</i>	Abate Assefa	58	Wore Illu	23/02/2017	
8	<i>Ato</i>	Iyasu Abera	46	Addis Ababa	02/06/2017	
9	<i>Ato</i>	Getachewu Assefa	77	Addis Ababa	18/04/2018	
10	<i>Ato</i>	Samuel Mesganaw	81	Dessie	07/03/2017	
11	<i>MelakeBirhan</i>	Gebre Tasadik	67	Sayint	22/05/2017	
12	<i>Sheikh</i>	Abdu Mohammed	56	Tenta	19/05/2017	
1	<i>Ato</i>	Kedir Ali	49	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
3	<i>Dr.</i>	Dagnachew Assefa	52	Addis Ababa	19/04/2018	
14	<i>Ato</i>	Arage Mihretu	48	Sayint	22/05/2017	
15	<i>Ato</i>	Tefera Melaku	82	Dessie	08/03/2017	
16	<i>Abba</i>	Yosef Gwangul	79	Dessie	08/03/2017	
17	<i>Haji</i>	Seid Hussen	66	Harbu, Qallu	10/03/2017	

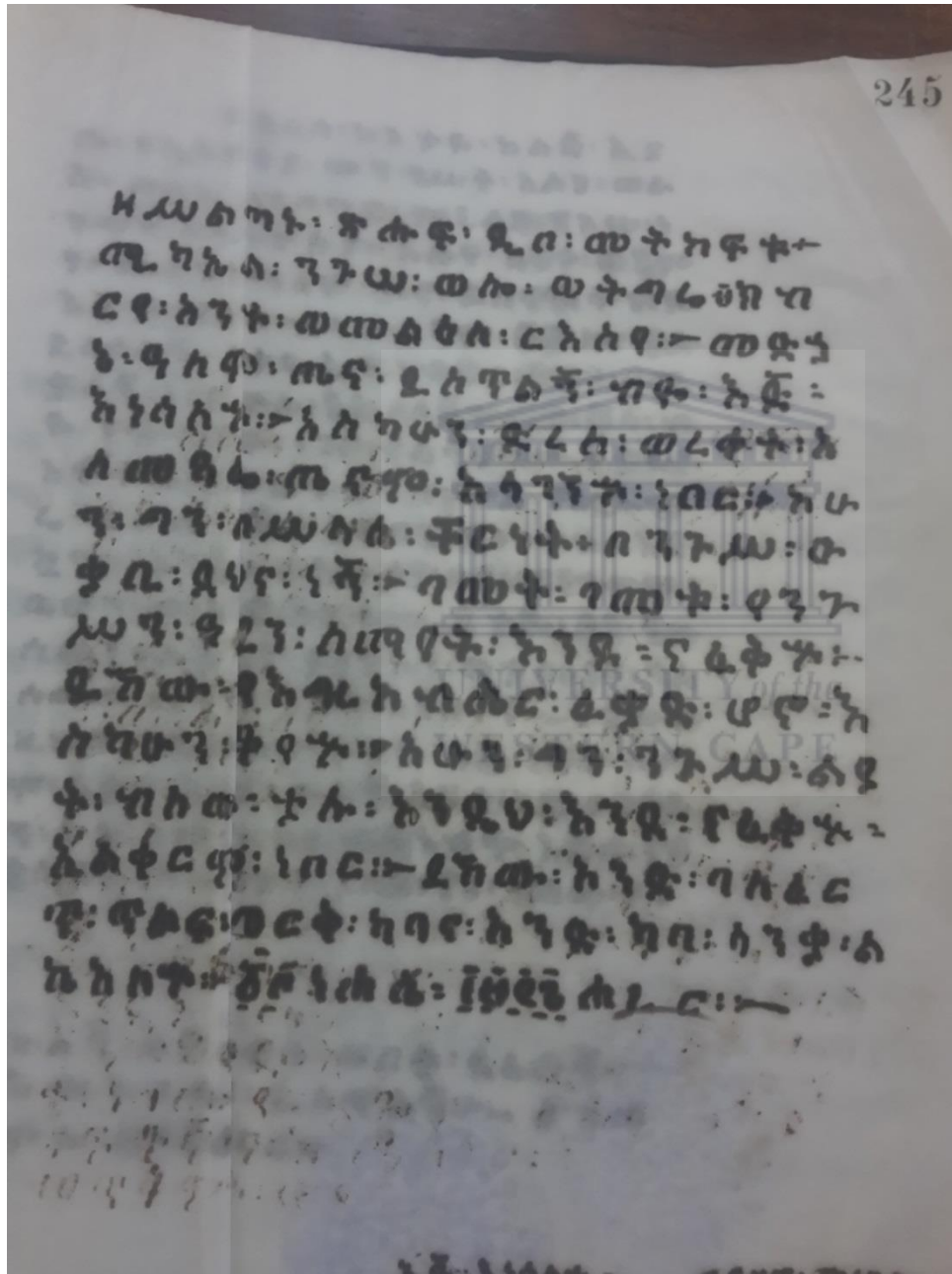
18	<i>Liq-Tababet</i>	Sirak Melese	57	Dessie	07/03/2017	
19	<i>Ato</i>	Solomon Addisu	46	Addis Ababa	18/04/2018	
20	<i>Liqe-Kahenat</i>	Taye Tsgaw	74	Tenat Mikael	19/05/2017	
21	<i>Ato</i>	Asmammaw Hayle	72	Tenata Mikael	19/05/2017	
22	<i>Mamere</i>	Zena WoldeMikael	69	Dessie	09/03/2017	
23	<i>Ato</i>	Alelen GebreAmlak	67	Kobbo	02/05/2018	
24	<i>Sheikh</i>	Hussen Ebrahim	57	Tenta	20/05/2017	
25	<i>Sajin</i>	Taye Tesemma	76	Lalibela	14/05/2018	
26	<i>Ato</i>	Molla Yeshaw	58	Wore Illu	24/02/2017	
27	<i>Ato</i>	Dagnachew Alemu	52	Dessie	09/03/2017	
28	<i>Ato</i>	Sertse Firesibhat	43	Addis Ababa	19/04/2018	
29	<i>Ato</i>	Mesfin Arage	46	Dessie	09/03/2017	
30	<i>Ato</i>	Kassa Gedamu	76	Wore Illu	23/02/2017	
31	<i>Ato</i>	Assefa Sisay	59	Dessie	09/03/2017	
32	<i>Woizero</i>	Worke Kassa	54	Kombolcha	13/03/2017	
33	<i>Woizero</i>	Wubayehu Worku	35	Addis Ababa	20/04/2018	
34	<i>Ato</i>	Tamene Mengistu	73	Dessie	14/03/2017	
35	<i>Memre</i>	Ayalewu Wolde Maryam	67	Dessie	14/03/2017	
36	<i>Ato</i>	Dagne Chala	53	Debre Berhan	21/04/2018	
37	<i>Ato</i>	Getahun Mohammed	54	Dessie	15/03/2017	
38	<i>Ato</i>	Chane Kebede	61	Woldia	18/03/2018	

39	<i>Ato</i>	Bezabeh Arega	72	Lalibela	14/05/2018	
40	<i>Ato</i>	Nurye Abate	49	Woldia	18/03/2018	
41	<i>Gerazmach</i>	Wolle Aliyu	57	Woldia	18/03/2018	
42	<i>Ato</i>	Zinabu Tadesse	65	Kobbo	02/05/2018	
43	<i>Ato</i>	Tesfaye Kassa	44	Dessie	15/03/2017	
44	<i>Ato</i>	Assefa Ali	48	Dessie	15/03/2017	
45	<i>Ato</i>	Fetha Negest	53	Addis Ababa	13/07/2018	
46	<i>Aba</i>	Gebre-Sellassie Belay	41	Addis Ababa	13/07/2018	
47	<i>Sheikh</i>	Hussien Ali	56	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
48	<i>Sheikh</i>	Abdu Mohammed	72	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
49	<i>Ato</i>	Kebede Wolde Semayat	66	Dessie	15/03/2017	
50	<i>Ato</i>	Girma Abiy	48	Sayint	22/05/2017	
51	<i>Memher</i>	Hayla-Maryam	54	Dessie	16/03/2017	
52	<i>Ato</i>	Jemal Mohammed	67	Harbu, Qallu	12/03/2017	
53	<i>Ato</i>	Tekle Wolde-Giorgis	64	Boru Meda	10/03/2017	
54	<i>Ato</i>	Mekonen Ali	52	Dessie	15/03/2017	
55	<i>Ato</i>	Tesfaye Amede	71	Dessie	16/03/2017	
56	<i>Ato</i>	Emeshaw Worke	36	Addis Ababa	13/07/2018	

Selected Appendixes

Appendix I

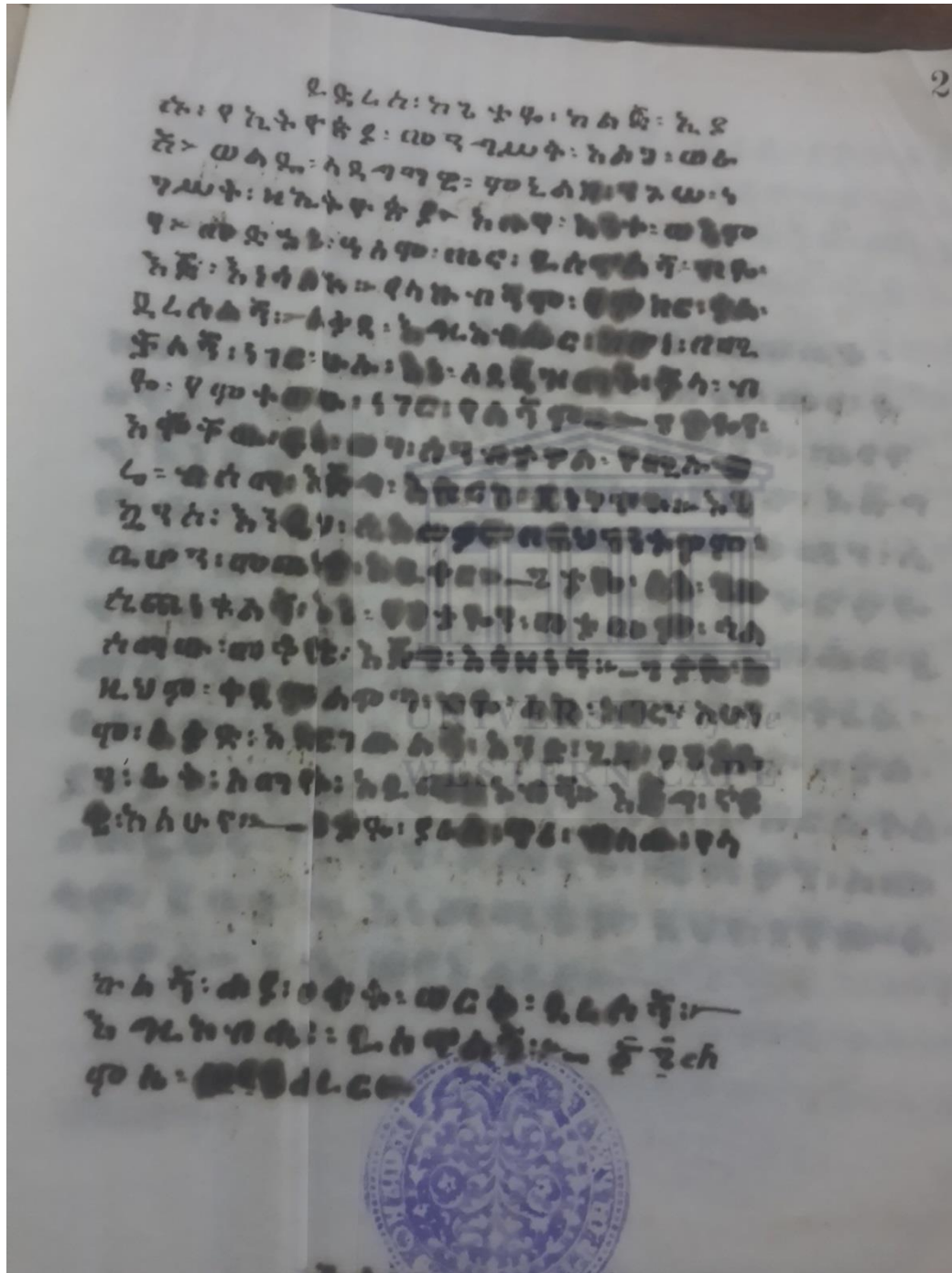
Letter from Ras Teferi to Negus Mikael of Wollo: 29 August 1914



Source: National Library and Archives Center of Ethiopia

Appendix II

Letter form Ras Teferi to Lij Iyasu: 2 August 1914

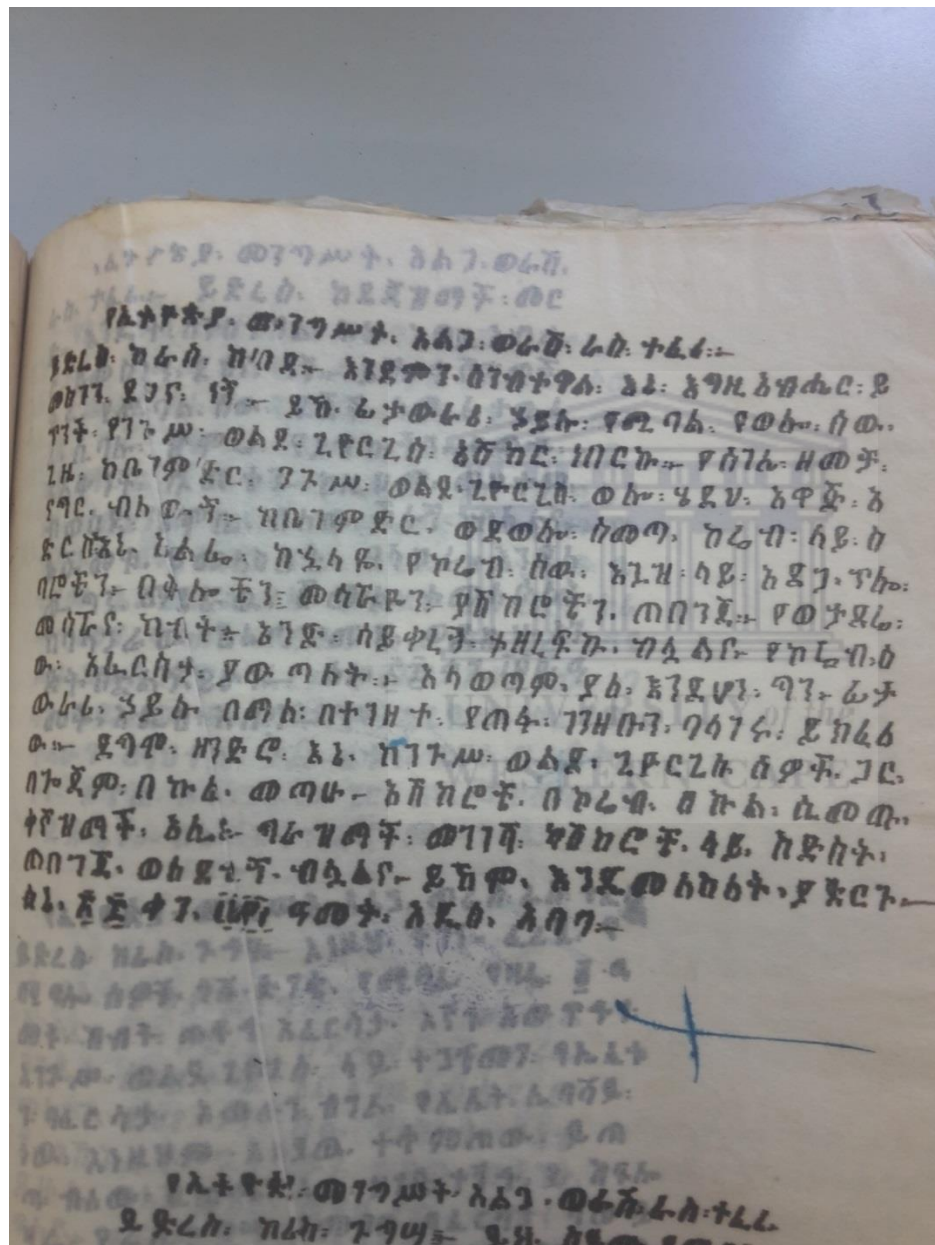


Source: National Library and Archives Center of Ethiopia

Appendix III

Letter from Ras Teferi to Ras Kebede Mengesha, the post-Segelle governor of Wollo: 5 July

1918



Source: National Library and Archives Center of Ethiopia

Petition by the people of Wollo to the Imperial government



ያበረረት መሪያ በሥራ ላይ ወጥሶ የጋሉ ሕዝብ አያዘነና አያለየበ ሸከው ተቀበለ። አሁንም ችግሩ እየተጠለ በመሬቱ ገርግጦ ገሥት በ1966 ዓ.ም. ሂደት ችግረኛውን ገዢው የሮ ባታ አቸውን ዘርገው ከ1960 ዓ.ም. አስከ 1965 ዓ.ም. ያለውን ወዘተ ገበር ሥረጽል በ ረ ለለሱ በረ ዘር ለለሱ ዘር አገላለጽ በላው ከአወቅ በኋላ ደባዊዎች ለገሡ በዙ የገሡ ገሥቱን ትዕዛዝ በመጣስ ተጠያቂን ሕዝብ በገን ክርባታ ቢቀበሉ በገን ገበር ከረሱ በግልት ስ ለስገደቱት ሕዝቡ አሁንም እየተሰደደ በመጣት ላይ ይገኛል።

ከጣራው ሆነ ከኢንተርናሽናል በገ አዲሪያች የተገኘው ክርባታ በፍጹም ለተቸገረው ገዢ በ ትክክል በሰውደረቡና የጣዙ በው ሕይወት አገዳጭ በግልጽ ሲገኝ ደባዊዎች ለገሡ በዙ ከሥራ ጭ ታገደው ለፍርድ አገላለጽ አገጣጥሟል። በከከሰጉ ስሙ ሆነ በሌላ በተዘረዘረ ገዢና በተረሸኑት ተግሪያች ደጋ ተጠያቂዎች ደባዊዎች በሌላን አባርሞቹ ሲሄድ ሀገሪቱ ገርግ የሕገስ ስለሆኑ ለፍርድ አገላለጽ ይገኛል።

ለወረሃውኛ ወረሀሉና ደስ ዘሪያ ሕዝብ ወያኔውና ወያኔውና ደባዊዎች በሌላን አባርሞቹ ከፍተኛ ፍሰስ አገገግ አላፊያች ስለሆኑ አስቸኳይ ውብ ኢንባስትሚንት። ከዚህ በላይ ያሉትን ሰባቶች በፍርድ ሰው ላኛ በሰውኛ ፍጹም አገላለጽ ስለሆነ አስከ መደሻ ደረሰ ትገ ለችገን በየአቀጣጣው የፍጥነት መሆኑን ለመቀላቀል ገዢው ዘላቂ ወጭትና አገላለጽ አገላለጽ ት ኢንባስትሚንት ኢንባስትሚንት የኢንባስትሚንት አላፊነት የተረከቡት ከባር መቀላቀል ሲሰኙ በጥላቆ ኢንባስትሚንት የሮ ደባዊዎችን በኢንባስትሚንት አገላለጽ ይገኛል።

በደሉ የሚኖሩት የሀገሩ ተወላጆች።



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